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## MISS BETHUNE'S ROMANCE.

### I.

'Quick, quick, she has a new bonnet on!' cried Harriette (pronounced Harr-yett) Clinton, with excitement.

Her sister Louisa was just brushing her hair the wrong way to make it fluffy in front, so that she could not instantly comply with Harriette's injunction; but the moment her hands were free she flew across the room.

'Ah, she's gone *now*!' exclaimed the first speaker, not without a tinge of gratification in her tone.

'O, of course, directly I come,' returned Louisa crossly; and she craned her neck from the window, without succeeding in more than catching a glimpse of a victoria just disappearing round the corner of the square. 'Well, she might have asked one of us to go with her,' said she; 'not that I should have been able to go.'

'O, she is a selfish creature,' returned her sister; 'and I'm sure I wish we had not asked her for to-night.'

In the victoria sat Miss Bethune, a neighbour of the Clintons. She was starting for a lawn-tennis party in the Horticultural Gardens, after which she intended, time permitting, to look in at two or three 'at homes.' The

beginning of June had really brought a fine day at last, so that she had seized the opportunity to wear for the first time a summer bonnet which had long been waiting.

Who is Miss Bethune? She is a lady of excellent family and comfortable fortune. Her father, a baronet, dying whilst she was still a child, had left her, with her brother and sister, to the care of his widow. For a year this lady, a woman of a highly-cultivated understanding and a keen appreciation of the pleasures of fashion and society, had fulfilled her duties in a manner that left nothing to be desired. At the expiration of this period the conversation of a young squire of the neighbourhood—her inferior in means and position, though not in education—began to engross a considerable part of Lady Bethune's attention. Conversation gave place to attention on the part of the young gentleman, a Mr. Maule: he began to encroach on the claims of the young people. Briefly, Lady Bethune consented to become his wife. She loved him with the fervour of a woman who sees youth passing, with the large demands she had made on life's happiness all unsatisfied. He regarded his mar-

riage in the light of an advantageous sacrifice. He gave his freedom, and he gained position, money, and a woman of whom he might be proud in society. To a *novus homo* (for his father had laid the foundation of the family) these were inestimable advantages.

Meantime our heroine, whose Christian name was Hester, and her brother and sister fared indifferently. Mr. Maule and Lady Bethune started on a tour, intending to gratify the artistic tastes which had first brought them together by visiting the most celebrated galleries of Europe. They agreed that it would be best to leave the children at home. These were happy days for Hester and her little brother and sister. They delighted in the literature of the desert-island, and shared a passion for adventure. No provision had been made for their instruction, and they ran wild about the woods at home, their nerves unimpaired by the daily occurrence of hair-breadth escapes from the robbers and pirates with whom they had peopled the place. Theirs was a stirring life. Often Hester and her brother were obliged to carry the little Jane for miles,—a process which, by impeding their flight, doubled the risk they ran of capture by the savages who were always on their track. *Never* did they leave the house without a supply of glass beads or some gingerbread to propitiate these inexorable creatures in case of the worst; and by this means they were always fortunate enough to escape with their lives, though not always without injuries.

Hester was happy. She cherished an intense admiration for her brother John. His coolness in moments of peril, his readiness in ingenious expedients, had

given her an absolute faith in him. Little Jane—she loved Jane with a protecting love that resembled a mother's.

Presently Mr. Maule and Lady Bethune returned from their tour. They had visited all the art-galleries of Europe, and the romance of their married life was over. The wife, it is true, still loved her husband devotedly; but she began to see that he felt he had made a sacrifice. She strained every nerve to prevent his realising this. Maule had inherited a taste for the accumulation of bullion from his father, an Edinburgh lawyer who had made his fortune. Lady Bethune's tastes were naturally lavish and luxurious; but she curtailed her expenditure by every means in her power, that her husband might have the gratification of pocketing her ample jointure. But Mr. Maule was not satisfied. When a selfish man sees that the efforts of all around him are bent to the one end of pleasing him, he becomes impossible to please; and this was the case with Maule. He developed an extreme irritation of temper. It was in vain that his poor wife dismissed every servant with whom she could possibly dispense, and observed the most rigid frugality in all domestic arrangements; she still failed to secure his approbation. Even the economies effected at the expense of her toilette, perhaps the greatest proof of self-denial which she could have afforded him, failed to move him.

In this unkindly atmosphere the young Bethunes grew up. Little Sir John was soon packed off to a school where the charges were moderate, and Hester was committed to the care of a foreign governess—an inferior person.

Poor Hester! She began already to look back on a golden

past. Mr. Maule was nervous and could not bear children, and Lady Bethune's attentions to them were confined to the quelling of the smallest disturbance. The governess made fun of her long legs, and forbade strictly all literature of an imaginative order. Even John was changed when he came home from school. He only cared for ferreting and killing rats now, and the desert-island days were at an end.

In these changed circumstances Hester developed a reserved temperament which never left her. She became accustomed to think for herself. Much secret attention she devoted to her small sister—washing her, kissing her when she was in bed, and consoling her when she fell down-stairs. Jane was a delicate child, and the *régime* which Mr. Maule's anxiety to prevent waste had necessitated admitted of no sort of coddling. When Lady Bethune remarked what a miserable mite her youngest born remained, her husband prescribed a cold bath every morning and a diet of porridge.

When Hester was about seventeen her mother died. Her idolatry for her second husband had continued to the end, and she had enjoyed no happiness so great as that of saving money for him. With this money Mr. Maule had repaired and added much to the family seat of his particular branch of the Maules. Thither he now repaired, taking with him his stepdaughters, who had been left under his guardianship. Sir John had gone into the army, and spent his leave in travelling.

Within the year Mr. Maule married again; this time a wife who was by many years his junior. Mrs. Maule began by being very charming to the Misses Bethune;

but she secretly thought that they were very much in the way. When time had rendered her less scrupulous as to what sentiments she avowed in the presence of her husband, she one day broached this opinion in so many words, and without diplomacy. Mr. Maule replied that he perfectly understood and sympathised with her, but that, as liberal provision had been made for the young ladies to defray the cost of their board and lodging, it would be injudicious to get rid of them.

Now Mrs. Maule did not share her husband's notions with regard to money. One of a large family, she had been accustomed to have very little before her marriage, and her private resolve had been to spend liberally now. She thought it absurd for a man of her husband's means to consider the mere trifle which the presence of Hester and Jane brought him. But she did not mention this. Nevertheless, in a few months the Misses Bethune left the house. Sir John had placed his house at their disposal, and they gladly went to reside there, still maintaining amicable relations with the Maules. Hester, who had a horror of being in any one's way, had considered this step before, but a feeling of loneliness had prompted her to cling, as long as there was a doubt, even to the Maules. Latterly, however, she was left no doubt that Mrs. Maule preferred greatly her room to her company.

At their old home Hester and her sister led a peaceful and contented existence for several years. She lived in entire seclusion. Jane was extremely delicate, and Hester's education had rendered her painfully shy and averse to society. She devoted herself to study, and watching carefully over the health of her fragile sister. The two girls were all

in all to each other. Jane, a helpless child, depended entirely on her elder sister. Hester transacted all the business, managed the money, ordered the dinner, made plans for the afternoon.

At last Sir John wrote to say that he was about to be married, and would return home shortly. The sisters took fright. Their brother's long absence had caused a reserve to grow up between him and them. Hester feared again to intrude on the privacy of a newly-married couple. She just waited to see her new sister-in-law, and then started to go abroad. This step began indeed to be demanded by the condition of Jane's health. The best doctor in Edinburgh had confided to Miss Bethune his fears that her sister was falling into a decline. These fears were but too well founded. Without experiencing any pain, Jane gradually lost strength and appetite. Hester's most watchful care was unavailing. After a year or so of wandering about on the Continent, the invalid broke a blood-vessel, and soon afterwards died.

Hester's grief was deep. From her childhood her little sister had been the darling upon whom she had lavished her affection. Her heart was naturally a warm and tender one, and this was the one outlet which had been afforded for its love. But without near friends or relations to whom she could open her heart, her sorrow was obliged to be a silent one, and time gradually deadened its sharpness.

She paid a visit to her brother and his wife, and then resolved to settle in London. Being a person of very refined taste, the choice and fitting up of her house afforded her agreeable occupation.

During her travels she had picked up many choice articles,

with which she now proceeded to adorn a charming house, in the same square as that of the Clintons, of which she had taken a lease. She took a pleasure in having everything of the best; and this taste her fortune and that of her sister, which she had inherited, permitted her to gratify. She made her house perfect in an unpretending but no less exquisite style.

Nor was she long in forming a circle of acquaintances. Friends of the family called upon her, and made her known to friends of theirs. Families from her part of the country called upon her when they came to town. Her excessive shyness had worn off with her youth, and, though still extremely reserved, she had *savoir vivre* in a large degree. She began to give small musical entertainments, which she made very perfect in their way. Pleased with her success, she came to take a pleasure in society, of which she had formerly imagined herself incapable. It was knowing nothing about it that had made her think this. Her toilette, about which she had always been careful, now became an object of interest to her. Society in its turn looked upon her as a distinctly desirable person.

At the time when this story opens, Miss Bethune had been settled in London for some years. She was thirty-eight years of age. Too old for a heroine, schoolgirl? Well, perhaps.

The early habit of relying upon herself, in addition to the companionship of a person so much her junior both in age and disposition as Jane, had, however, given her an exaggerated idea of her own antiquity. She considered herself already an elderly woman, and entirely beyond the pale of juvenile prospects and diversions. She had some habits not usually



contracted until a much later period in life. Among others she took a great interest in young people. Of these she had several who came frequently to call upon her, and corresponded with her at length when not in the same neighbourhood. Chief amongst these were the Clintons; for Mrs. Clinton had visited her as soon as she had had time to ascertain that she was of respectable family. She had consequently been acquainted with Harriette and Louisa from the time they were school-girls. She had been kind to them, interesting herself in their accomplishments and engagements, and occasionally making them presents, and taking them with her to places of amusement; in fact, she lavished upon them some of the kindness which would have been Jane's had she lived.

In return for this the Clinton girls always spoke of her as one of their best friends, and took great care always to be charming when they were at her house. But nevertheless they found it impossible to overlook her many shortcomings. With her income, and no one but herself to spend it on, she might easily have done twice as much for them. The gifts which they received were far from giving them satisfaction. Good enough in their way, they might have been better, and of more frequent occurrence. In short, to decry Miss Bethune was with the Clintons a favourite way of passing half an hour.

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## II.

'HAVE you seen my handkerchief?' inquired Louisa, in a flurried manner, of her sister.

They had just finished dressing for a dinner-party which Mrs.

Clinton was giving that night, and at which Miss Bethune was expected.

'No,' replied Harriette unconcernedly.

She had everything, and was just powdering her face in front of the glass.

'I can't think where it can be; I had it a minute ago,' continued Louisa, pushing carelessly against her in the anxiety of her search, and causing her to put a great deal too much powder on her nose.

It was a special pocket-handkerchief.

'I believe that Sarsnet has hidden it!' exclaimed the seeker, in a moment, with considerable heat. She was hastening round the room, spreading disorder wherever she went. 'She is far more trouble than use!'

Sarsnet was the young ladies' maid; and if ever anything was not in its place, they always affirmed that she had stolen it or hidden it to spite them.

At length the missing handkerchief was found under a pin-cushion, which some heedless person had placed upon it. Louisa hastened down-stairs. There was as yet but one arrival in the drawing-room. This was a young man named John Bengough, a distant connection of the Clinton family, who had lately come over from Australia, in order that he might enjoy the benefit of an English university education. He was at Trinity, Cambridge, and was spending 'the Long' in town.

About his invitation there had been considerable discussion; for both the young ladies assured their parents that, from what they had already seen of him, he was a young man of *gauche* manners, and not one of whom they could in any sense be proud. Mrs. Clinton accordingly decided that

she would not invite him; but at the last moment she received a note from a young man regretting that a bad cold would prevent his having the pleasure of dining with her that evening. So after all they were obliged to fall back on John, who accepted with pleasure.

He was a young man about the middle height, with broad shoulders, a fresh complexion, an incipient beard most offensive to the exquisites of his college, and spectacles.

Miss Bethune being the guest whom they knew best, the Clintons had arranged that their doubtful friend should be her neighbour.

During soup-time that lady was occupied by conversation with her other neighbour, an old acquaintance with whom she had not recently exchanged ideas.

After a slight skirmish with a young lady on his left, Bengough sat waiting an opportunity to speak to her. At length there was a pause in her dialogue with her old friend.

'Have you seen Irving in *Hamlet*?' asked the Australian hastily, lest the opportunity should escape.

Hester turned to him.

'Yes,' she replied, smiling pleasantly; 'and I suppose you have too? Tell me what you think of him; as a lady I reserve my opinion till I have heard yours.'

'Well,' replied Bengough frankly, 'I don't like him at all; and yet I have heard that he is the only conscientious actor on the stage. I object extremely to his pronunciation.'

'There I am inclined to agree with you,' answered Hester; 'still, I think you are rather hard on him. His *Hamlet* is intelligent, though very likely not quite the one you and I would wish to see.'

This coupling of his name with hers pleased Bengough. He was aware that his coat was not quite what might have been desired, and had experienced a misgiving that his manners and discourse were not exactly those of London; and this consciousness had raised a defiant mood in him, but at these words it was softened.

Miss Bethune and Mr. Bengough now found plenty to say to each other. The lady had a knack of interesting people in the conversation which they held with her. It consisted in asking them about themselves. It is a subject upon which all have something to say—many a good deal, and that extremely agreeable to their own ears.

In reply to her artfully couched inquiries, John Bengough readily gave her much information concerning his history and prospects. He had had rather a rough life hitherto, as appeared; had lived in one of the less civilised parts of Australia, and had had experience of manual labour. During this time, however, he had managed to keep up a connection between himself and the classics; and he had now come to England, on the death of his parents, in the hope of obtaining a fellowship at Cambridge. He was already, as he eagerly informed his listener, a scholar of his college.

Hester heard all this with interest. She appreciated the *naïveté* with which her neighbour impressed upon her some details of his history, careful lest she should overlook any item redounding to his credit.

'And now you are spending the vacation in town to see something of London life'

'Well, I do not expect to see very much of that,' said Bengough; 'for beyond the Clintons

I know no one. The fact is, I intended to have spent the time in "doing" England; but unfortunately I found my finances wouldn't stand it,' he added, smiling.

Miss Bethune sympathised with him. There was no trusting to financial appearances, as she well knew. But as for making acquaintances in London, that was an easy business, particularly for a young man. She ended by proposing that, if he had nothing better to do, he should come and see her some day. She was at home on Thursdays. Bengough was delighted. He accepted, his face radiant with pleasure.

When the gentlemen joined the ladies he came straight to Miss Bethune, and remained with her the rest of the evening. When she played he turned the leaves for her, a thing which his anxiety to be exactly at the right moment caused him to do with very little adroitness.

Afterwards they had more conversation; Miss Bethune introducing him to a young lady who was a friend of hers, and who was seated near, and the three chatted very agreeably. When it was time to go the Clinton girls took an effusive farewell of Hester, less, indeed, on account of any particular feelings which the occasion excited than because there were those present whom they wished to show how well their effusive farewells became them.

Bengough walked home in the highest spirits, delighted with Miss Bethune and with himself, and full of visions of successes in society.

### III.

'WELL, I think everything went off very well last night,' said Mrs.

Clinton to her daughters the next morning at breakfast. There was considerable satisfaction in her voice.

It was Sunday, the dinner-party having been given on a Saturday in order that a member of Parliament, whose acquaintance was felt to be creditable, might be present.

'On the whole, yes,' replied Louisa, after a moment's meditation; 'the eating was delicious. I still regret extremely that I did not take twice of those sweet-breads.'

'Don't say they were good,' exclaimed her sister, 'for I did not taste them. I had fully intended to when writing the *memoirs*; but that hired waiter handed everything with such indecent haste, that, in the excitement of talking, I let them pass.'

'John Bengough was the blot on the evening; why can't he get boots with pointed toes?'

'His talk was I can't tell you how trite, too,' said Harriette. 'I overheard him speaking of Irving in *Hamlet*, comparing the Academy and Grosvener Gallery, and other such painful solecisms. It quite made me blush.'

'Miss Bethune seemed to find plenty to say to him.'

'O, it is a forlorn hope, I suppose; old maids are always like that; they cannot afford to be disagreeable to any one.'

And breakfast being late, the young ladies hastened up-stairs to get their hats and *fichus* for church; prayer-books they did not require, being of those who know the service by heart.

That very day John Bengough called on Miss Bethune. She was in her room when he arrived, and he had to wait a few minutes in the drawing-room. He examined the room with great admiration. Bengough had never been accus-

tomed to think of these things before; but he now began to experience a vague pleasure from the harmonious colouring of the cretonne, the old china and wall-paper, and the subdued fragrance of some genista. When Hester entered the room she seemed entirely in keeping with all this delicate refinement. Her gently modulated voice and her soft drab draperies belonged to the same category of things.

Bengough had just come from making his duty-call on the Clintons. It being an early hour, he had found them all unprepared for visitors. The whole family had been digesting their early dinner in easy postures in the drawing-room, and there had been a general scrimmage when he was announced, for all the crochet antimacassars were either rucked up in wisps or else on the floor, and Louisa had taken off her shoes. When it had been discovered that the disturber was only their relation, the shock to their digestions had reacted on their tempers, which had remained during the rest of the interview in the condition associated with packing up in haste or riding in a close carriage with one's back to the horses.

During his conversation with Miss Bethune John involuntarily contrasted these two visits.

'How pretty your room is!' said he almost immediately.

'Do you like it?' answered she with modesty; 'well, that is a compliment of a peculiarly gratifying nature to me.'

'I think it is the prettiest room I ever was in,' exclaimed John enthusiastically.

'You know one of the things I plume myself on is a knack of picking up pretty things at reasonable prices. I must show you a bargain I made the other day,

and which is still filling me with self-satisfaction.'

The bargain was a piece of Venetian glass. They went across the room to examine it, and Hester entered upon a humorous description of the manner by which it had come into her hands. As she began at her first sight of it in the back shop of a *brocanteur* in the neighbourhood of Leicester-square, and narrated circumstantially the various steps which had led to her at last securing it, the description occupied a few minutes. Bengough's attention had time to wander, for his interest in the Venetian glass was not quite such as its exquisite workmanship might have warranted. Miss Bethune had a lively sensibility, and quickly suspected this. Nevertheless, she was surprised when on raising her gaze she beheld her visitor's eyes, which were not generally of a particularly speaking order, fixed upon herself with an undeniable expression of the frankest admiration.

She was disconcerted, and turned aside, finishing her story in a few words.

Mr. Bengough's visit was a long one, but Miss Bethune did not find it fatiguing, for she was one of those who would as soon listen to a man's experiences and hopes, as to his rendering of the recent scandal, or quotations from the art-criticisms in the newspapers.

At last Bengough took his departure. Miss Bethune had mentioned an intention of attending evening service at St. James's, and it struck her visitor with astonishment as he was walking home that he had not yet heard Mr. Haweis preach. It was an intention he had so long cherished. He dined hastily, and started in the direction of Paddington. But Hester was a devout listener in church, and when she chanced on

one occasion to raise her eyes to the gallery she did not remark that a gaze which had long been levelled in her direction was withdrawn with the speed of an unquiet conscience, a sight which might have suggested certain reflections to her mind.

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IV.

'THERE is John Bengough coming here, at last,' said Louisa Clinton, who was looking from behind the Venetian-blind, one warm afternoon.

'It is more than a month since he has called,' returned Harriette. 'I call it very ungrateful, after all we have done for him.'

'Well, I am sure we do not want him,' said Louisa; 'only he must have found it very dull without us, for to my certain knowledge he hasn't a friend in the world.'

'O, you're mistaken,' cried Harriette; 'I have seen him several times going in and out of Miss Bethune's. I wish Miss Bethune would mind her own business; she is a deal too fond of interfering with other people. I believe it is there that he's going now—yes, he has passed the house.'

'What can she see in him?'

'Or he in her?'

'I wonder what they find to talk about,' continued Harriette, smiling. 'I should like to see them together.'

It was true that Bengough had called on Miss Bethune with unconventional frequency during the past month. The charm which he had at first experienced in her society had deepened on further acquaintance. His existence at Cambridge had been rather a dreary one; for, though his disposition was sociable, life there was

too new to him to admit of his readily making friends. He had come unusually near to the realisation of that ideal of hard work and frugal living which so many undergraduates entertain; and for the time he had looked stoically on all those supplementary rays of light and warmth which render life more human. His intercourse with the Clintons had strengthened him in this frame of mind; but his introduction to Miss Bethune had added a new light to his views of things. He began to see that he had despised that with which he was not really acquainted. He had judged of the elegances and refinements of life, not from the things themselves, but from his own hasty conclusion as to what they must be. Here was a revelation to him; and one in comparison with which his old ideal sank into coarseness and insufficiency. But it was characteristic of Bengough that the delight he took in the new views to which he had been converted entirely outweighed any jealousy, which it might have been natural for one who had adhered so devoutly to his tenets to experience on seeing them supplanted. Small changes are liable to be looked upon as eras when one is twenty-three and new to culture and society, and the young Australian now looked back to the period, previous to his acquaintance with Miss Bethune, with the same astonishment as a critic of the present day might be moved to by the bygone supremacy of the *Edinburgh Review*.

Hitherto, John Bengough had seen little of womankind, and he had thought little thereon. With the passion of love, it is true, he was, to a degree, conversant, for he had read, by way of culture rather than for enjoyment, some of the standard novels in the English

language, and most of the lyric poetry. These studies had had the effect of disinclining him to believe in the genuineness of the passion described, or, admitting its existence, to regard it as the monopoly of the unoccupied or the weak-minded. He indeed looked forward to marrying some day, when, apart from his fellowship, he should have secured an independent position; but his prophetic glimpse of the lady of his choice had taken the form rather of a kind and sensible friend, who would be the mother of his children, than of a paragon of beauty, at whose feet it would be his ambition to fall.

This is often the way with men whom the circumstances of their lives have led to believe that they incline towards phlegm. But it is only natural that these very men, whose amatory energies have never been trifled with, should be the most ardent when once ignited. Thus it was with Bengough.

Now, to the minds of all readers of fiction of any experience, one fatal obstacle, alone sufficient to prevent Mr. Bengough from the dream of proposing marriage to the lady of his affections, must at once present itself. He was a poor man; she was a woman of easy fortune. Yet unnatural as it may appear, this circumstance formed no deterrent to the mind of the young man. Ourselves, indeed, are inclined to believe that to few naturally honourable men would it have done so; nay more, we should certainly have expected one of two sequels to await the man to whom it did. Either he would be pushed from the edge of a cliff by a villain, or else the ship in which he was returning home would be lost with all on board. But this is not all, for, after due lapse of time, we should certainly expect him to

reappear—in the first case, having miraculously escaped without injury; or, in the second, having at the last moment changed his mind and come home by another vessel. John Bengough had strong arms, a hard head, and a fine energy.

Miss Bethune's sharp eyes were not without catching some indications of change in the young Australian. She remarked that for some time back he had ceased to talk eagerly, as at first, about the chances of securing a fellowship. She imagined that the attractions of London might be getting between him and his purpose; and, consistently with the interest which she took in him, she resolved to give him a word of caution.

That she suspected no more of the real state of his feelings was due to the fact that he had hitherto concealed it studiously. Though longing for an opportunity to declare himself, a certain diffidence and conscious ignorance as to how people generally acted in these cases had caused him up to the present to reject what occasions had offered, on the ground that they were likely to be the precursors of better ones. Matters had been in this state for some time, when Bengough at last determined to bring it to an end. It was on the afternoon when Louisa Clinton had observed her connection approach Miss Bethune's dwelling that that lady resolved to take her visitor to task on the ground of laxness in his former pursuit.

When they had been seated together for some minutes, she began:

'Do you know, Mr. Bengough, that I notice a change in you since first you used to come and see me?'

'Do you?' cried John joyfully.

The opportunity was surely come.



'Yes,' replied Miss Bethune somewhat apologetically, 'indeed, I do.'

John's heart beat too fast to allow him to fill up this momentary gap in the conversation, although he longed to do so.

Hester continued half-playfully, 'When first you came here you were full of a certain ambition, one that interested me very much; but you seem for the moment to have lost it. You never speak of it. I even imagine that you avoid speaking of it. How is that? You see I am frank with you; be frank with me.'

She intended to go on to tell him that the motherly, or perhaps auntly, interest she took in him had prompted her to this step, and much more which may be imagined. But Bengough did not give her time.

'I will!' cried he. 'I have been wishing day and night to talk to you about it. It is true that I have lost that old ambition, but I have found another one that makes me indifferent about the old one and everything else—'

He had started forward, and held her hand in his. He had full command of his voice now; love-making seemed simple, easy—the one natural thing in the world.

'The Miss Clintons!' cried at this moment the footman, flinging the door wide open.

Louisa and her sister had come to see for themselves what Miss Bethune and Bengough found to talk about together.

## V.

THINKING is a luxury for which the woman of fashion oftener than the sempstress has to wait. It is frequently night-time before the

former can snatch half an hour from the infinite small calls upon her time to quietly dwell upon, digest, and view in all its bearings some indication, word, or situation which has been in her mind since the morning. Thus it was with Hester Bethune. The young Australian's sudden fervour had surprised her beyond measure. Her feminine instinct told her that he had been on the brink of an offer of marriage when the Clintons arrived. And yet this was so completely unexpected, that it seemed incredible. She questioned the efficacy of her instinct. She longed for quietness to repeat John's words to herself, and arrive at a conclusion, founded on something more to be relied upon than instinct, concerning their weight.

But it was not to be. The Clintons stayed long, chattering in their most agreeable manner. They did not, in fact, move to take their departure until a fresh set of visitors was on the stairs. This second set remained until the dressing-bell rang. Then, at last, Miss Bethune was alone; but she was not free, for weariness had weakened her powers of opposition, and habit compelled her to submit to being attired by her maid. Then came dinner, during which she was again alone; but who could think with a servant in the room! At last the meal was over, and she was back in the drawing-room. The time was come. Deliberately she seated herself at the writing-table, and, bracing herself for a serious effort, began to retrace the words of the afternoon. Need it be said that, by reflection and stern step-by-step deduction, she arrived at no conclusion? That John Bengough loved her was not long in appearing indisputable, but it was instinct unaided that taught her this.

Resting her head on her hands, Miss Bethune reflected on the position.

He loved her—the thought sent a glow through her heart. It is true that before that afternoon she had never thought of regarding him in the light of a possible husband; but with a woman, the mere declaration of love is often enough to inspire a return of the passion. He loved her; already he had given proof of his devotion by the impetuous sacrifice of all his cherished prospects for her sake. It was a delicious thought. Her life hitherto had been so bare of love; her want of it had been so great. With closed eyes she abandoned herself for a moment to the sweetness of this dream. She saw Bengough in his rugged simplicity before her. She thought of his sternly conscientious guidance of his own life, of his fresh heart, of the complete absence of self-consciousness in him (and this is a charm of peculiar power to a woman). Her heart warmed and her eyes filled with tears. Almost she felt that strong arm round her, that rough warm cheek against her own.

But no, no, it was only a dream; a dream which one might acquiesce in for a few moments, but which could have no realisation in subsequent events. It was not to be thought of. Hester was fifteen years older than her lover; 'and yet,' said she, 'I think I could make him happy.' Ah, for a few years perhaps; but look ahead; think of the time when he will be forty and you five-and-fifty—he in the prime of life; you an old woman. Too true!

Late into the night did Hester continue seated at her writing-table. At length she rose suddenly, with the swift movement of one who has come to a decision, and hastens to begin carrying it

out, lest his hardly-won prize escape. There were traces of fresh tears about her eyelashes; but her heart was, if full of sadness, serene.

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## VI.

THE next day John Bengough called again; but Miss Bethune was not at home. She had a faint hope, one of those groundless hopes in which no one believes, but on the strength of which many act, that the complications of the situation might find some solution in which she should not be obliged to take the active part. She experienced a painful shrinking from the task which lay before her; but the more painful this shrinking seemed, the more resolute did she in her inward self become that her duty was not one to be shirked or postponed.

She was angry with herself when she heard that Bengough had called. She had half hoped he would have written; and seeing that he had not, she began to think how much better for them both it would have been if he had. But these thoughts only continued for a few moments. The sight of her lover's card roused her, and she came quickly to a resolution.

There was an evening party at the Clintons' that night, from which she had intended excusing herself; she would go. She went.

The party was a great success. Harriette and Louisa had been for many days engaged in contrivances by which it might appear that much money had been expended on the decoration of the room, such not in reality being the case. They had worked on the comfortable principle that anything which they did not wish to be seen would not be noticed.

'People do not look at things

so closely at a party,' said Louisa reassuringly; 'or if they do, they have no business to,' she added more dogmatically. 'I'm sure I never do!'

Thus, with masterly rapidity and happy breadth of regard, these two artists in flowers had laboured, utilising all. The same principles applied to the supper and refreshments generally.

The Clinton girls were in particularly buoyant mood; they went about saying a few suitable words to every one, charmed by their cleverness and secretly pluming themselves on their discretion, and the admiration it must command in the eyes of the seeing. Dull people, of slightly inferior social standing, they asked after their relations; to young ladies they paid compliments on their toilettes and appearances; in the ears of young men they whispered wit on the peculiarities of persons present. They enjoyed themselves thoroughly.

Amateur music was one of the means which they provided for the entertainment of their guests; so that when Louisa had performed a song which was new and fashionable enough for every one present to have heard it two or three times before, and Harriette had come to the end of her Brinsley Richards' variations, they asked Miss Bethune to play something. She consented, and began a piece of Grieg's. Her playing was very artistic, and it brought many of those who laid claim to a taste for music to the piano. It was at this moment that John Bengough entered the room. There was a hush in the back drawing-room, and there he saw the woman he loved mistress of the situation. He leant his back against the folding-doors, and, putting his hands in his pockets, looked, listened, and thought.

Was it too much to hope that this queen of a world of true art and refinement (not the art or refinement of the Clintons) might consent to be his wife? John was naturally of a sanguine disposition, and a fortunate experience—the result of his energy and perseverance—had given him more self-confidence, and he felt that, though the prize would be great, it was not out of the question.

At length the music came to an end, and Bengough stepped up to greet his mistress. But on all sides there was an inundation of musical people thanking her, asking the name of the piece, that of the composer, whether she would be so very kind as to repeat her performance or play some other thing.

An inward tremor, occasioned by the sight of the young Australian, caused Hester to prefer dashing into a fresh and lively piece to farther taxing her voice by replies.

This second piece, 'The Norwegian Wedding,' was, at general request, repeated. This somewhat annoyed Bengough. He was impatient to say a few words to Miss Bethune in private, and he thought that it was not considerate of her to elude him in this manner. He could come to no conclusion as to how much the few sentences which he had spoken on the previous day might have revealed to her of what he had intended saying; but he now began to think that it must have been very little.

At length Hester left the piano, and John hastened towards her. She greeted him kindly, but with some constraint, occasioned by her anxiety to appear as if everything was just as usual; but this he did not observe.

Any private conversation was, however, out of the question, for a young gentleman had followed

the lady from the piano and was seated beside her, whence he looked coldly at Bengough.

An impulse to defer the final explanation, however; prompted Miss Bethune to retain him, and she asked him pleasantly whether he sang or played.

He replied that he could neither sing nor play, but enjoyed greatly listening to music.

Miss Bethune answered that it was a pity he did not learn some instrument, as that enjoyment evinced a taste for the art.

To this the young gentleman returned that he often thought of doing such a thing, but that the drudgery deterred him. If one could have arrived at a great rendering of Beethoven in one bound he would have hesitated no longer. As it was, he regretted that he had not been taught as a boy.

Bengough began to grow hot. He thought that never till now had he realised what frightful nonsense people talked at parties.

Miss Bethune, however, took care to include him in the conversation, and the three continued in their corner apparently with no inclination to stir.

A casual observer would have thought them a comfortable and amicable trio, agreeing remarkably in their opinions of the pieces performed.

At length Hester felt that this could go on no longer. She spoke of going. Mr. Lamplough, the gentleman of musical tastes, hastened to summon her carriage. Now was John's time,

'Let me take you down-stairs and get your wraps on, so that you may be ready,' said he.

To his surprise she drew back.

'Thank you,' said she, in a tone as if it did not matter; 'but I will wait till Mr. Lamplough comes back; there is no hurry.'

'I know there is no hurry,' answered Bengough; 'still, I ask you to let me take you down.'

The situation was developing.

'O, it is not worth while to trouble you,' answered Hester resolutely, though she wished that this climax had taken any other shape.

John was silent a moment; then he said, in a voice shaken by the intensity of the words he spoke,

'If you don't let me take you down-stairs, I shall never ask you anything else as long as I live.'

There was no chance of being overheard, for the Misses Clinton were singing a duet.

'Well, then,' answered Hester gently, with perhaps a tear in her voice, 'I suppose that is how it must be; but some day,' she added, 'you will see perhaps that I have been a better friend to you than you give me credit for being now.'

Now had this been merely a magazine story, we cannot with certainty specify what might have been the sequel; but as it is a page from real life, we have but to state that Bengough returned to work for his fellowship; and this was the end of *Miss Bethune's romance*.

## THE MYSTERY IN PALACE GARDENS.

BY MRS. J. H. RIDDELL.

### CHAPTER XXIV.

#### A LONELY MAN.

IF spending money could purchase health, Lady Moffat must speedily have found herself restored to perfect strength. There was a beautiful monotony about her letters which Sir John failed to find altogether pleasing. 'Do not forget the cheque.' 'Be sure you send a remittance by return of post.' 'I was much disappointed at not hearing from you to-day. I have not five pounds left.' 'I shall require another order by Wednesday at latest.'

No matter how wealthy a man may be, let his liberality be almost boundless, the eternal iteration of pecuniary demands becomes after a time trying to his temper. Sir John was rich and generous; he had never been one to look after cheeseparings, or inquire when he gave a sum of money how every halfpenny of it was disbursed; but at the same time, if he were strong in anything, it was in prudence; if there were one trait more pronounced than another in his nature, it was that of a keen and comprehensive business intelligence. He had known how to make money, how to take care of it, how to add to it; and it was a simple impossibility for a man to have been at the head of a large and solvent business for years, and at length fail in a capacity which should enable him to grasp the reasons for any expenditure which seemed to him excessive.

He had not the slightest inten-

tion of being ruined through any domestic extravagance. He knew well enough that many commercial adventurers not merely permit, but encourage, a lavish expenditure in order to what is called 'maintain credit,' and 'keep the ball moving;' but it was not for Sir John Moffat to follow suit in such an evil game. A quiet style of living, an unostentatious liberality, the comfort which springs from living well within an income, the satisfaction that arises from being able to give without feeling pinched in consequence, the sense of right in knowing children will not be left unprovided for—all these things, and these only, had seemed hitherto desirable in his eyes. Wild profusion, wasteful management, mad hospitality, shocked his feeling of propriety as well as his common sense.

In permitting a ball to be given, he had not intended his house should witness such a gathering as assembled under its roof; in allowing his wife to go to Scarborough, it never occurred to him she would run the pecuniary muck on which she had evidently started.

'I shall have to stop it,' he thought, after looking over his private account, and adding up the various sums he had forwarded, which amounted, indeed, to a most formidable total. 'I think I had better take Yorkshire on my way to Lancashire, and just see what they are doing. She has never given me any trouble of this sort before, and I am loth to speak about it, more especially as she is

out of health; but I am afraid Palace Gardens has turned her head a little. She forgets, poor soul, and she mistakes; and I have my doubts about that Miss Banks.'

He had to call in Great George-street; so he took Westminster on his way back from the City, and walked thence home slowly through the Parks. In former days he had not been over fond of Nature; business then supplied all the charm and change he wanted; but now, time and sorrow having taught him to feel the soothing expression the face of the great mother ever wears to those of her children who are weary of the world's hard ways, heart-broken to find the toys they have striven for valueless now they understand their paltry worth, there was nothing he loved so much as a quiet stroll beneath the trees, when the lights and shadows fell tenderly on the grass. How many a time had he not thought of his own wasted life as in the winter days he walked beside the darkling water in St. James's Park, and wondered in the spring-time whether in another world he would ever look upon such a season without mournful memories, without the tears of repentance dropping down in his heart, with the certainty that the stains of his sin were washed from his soul, and the assurance that his remorse had not been all in vain, and the atonement he had striven in all humility and with bitter grief to make was accepted! God knew that to him the fruits of sin had been bitter; that the typical Dead Sea apples were not more surely mere dust and ashes than the so-called happiness of fulfilled desire. Since that first morning, when in the early twilight he looked upon the woman who was his partner in wrong, though not in misery, he

had never known a day's real peace or comfort.

The world had prospered with him; the world often does so prosper with men otherwise miserable; but underneath the robe of affluence, closer to his heart than wife might ever creep or child nestle, lay the stinging scorpion and the gnawing fox.

In the dust he had trampled the honour of a man who trusted in him; on his soul, he felt, lay the death of one who had done him no evil, and yet to whom so much evil had been done, it was, he knew at the time, a relief to feel he could come back no more.

Sir John walked on! what a mockery that title, the esteem in which his fellows held him, the respect he received, the honour paid to what the world called his strict probity, his unswerving rectitude, seemed! Ah, how far away lay that time when he had been somewhat of a Pharisee; when, though conventionally calling himself vile, he really believed he was very good—not as others, not as that wretched publican, not as the woman divinely bidden 'to go and sin no more.'

That was all past and over; he had learned to be very humble and also to be very pitiful. He knew now what temptation meant, and what yielding to it involved; he did not still think that with eyes wide open a man always walked straight into the pit of sin; he comprehended the weak resolves, the blinded vision, the stumbling steps which so often precede the final fall. He himself had traversed the descent so gradual and so easy, that it is only when the height from which he started is looked back upon through blinding tears the wayfarer understands the depth of degradation into which his erring feet have led him.

This man, who had trodden the



downward path, no part of which was for him strewn with flowers, gazed on that summer evening, while he walked homeward, all abroad over his life. What had he made of it, what had his own act brought him? The sad gravity of the worn face, the wistful melancholy of the kindly gray eyes, told their story without need of further word.

He possessed riches, he had achieved position; those whose good opinion was to be prized spoke well of him; he went through the world with no external mark of the fire that had consumed his honour and destroyed his peace; he was considered a fortunate man; his labours in the cause of philanthropy were remembered, and his fellows extolled his name. In rounded sentences oratory had rolled forth panegyrics on his unselfishness, his liberality, his Christianity; if he were to die, he was sure preachers would refer to the loss of one foremost in every practical work of charity, and tell in touching language how his left hand scarce knew the number or value of the gifts his right delighted to bestow; and yet he knew, he and his Maker, that he was not happy, or fortunate, or content.

He knew that even the love which sometimes makes the burden of sin seem almost light had never been vouchsafed to him; that ice was not colder or the barren rock harder than the woman for whose beauty he had bartered away self-respect, hope, virtue; he knew that whilst taking all she could give nothing, for the simple reason she had nothing to give; no tenderness of heart, no grace of soul, no loveliness of mind, no instinct of understanding. It had been all loss; throughout no gain came to him. In his case the wages of sin had indeed been death. Look-

ing back, looking with his mental eyes on the darksome road he had traversed, the while his outward vision ranged over leafy trees and rippling water, and joyous children shrieking with delight as stately swans came onward to where they stood, he was aware that no glamour of love, no light of hope, no faithful friendship had offered the smallest compensation for the failures sustained. By his hearth no fond woman had greeted his return, from his windows no sweet face had watched for his coming; there had been no one to speed him onward to victory, to console him when disappointed, to sympathise with his success.

All loss, all loss; all thorns, no roses; fair to look upon till touched, and then the leaves lay scattered on the earth; sweet to the lips, bitter in the mouth; not even so much of pleasure as generally precedes pain; not even the sunshine before the storm.

Throughout, through all the long years, all the days and hours and minutes of his weary repentance, but one thing had brought him the faintest happiness, and that seemed often merely but one link in his long chain of punishment—Rachel.

As a child, as a girl, now when she was almost a woman, her love for him had been infinite. From the first she took to him; her baby heart, wrung at being torn from those who had loved and tended her, turned for consolation to the man by whom the separation was wrought. Her eyes—so like—so like the father she had never seen—were lifted full of tears in trust to a face which possessed no beauty to attract, no smiling wiles to beguile.

A stranger amongst strangers—for the first who passed along the street would have felt more kindly

towards the tiny creature than her own mother—she aroused the pity and awoke the love of a man lonely and desolate as herself. He had meant to be just to her, but no more. He had meant there should exist no difference between her and his own children; he intended her to be fed, clothed, housed, educated, dowered, as though she were his daughter. He said there should be no distinction made, she should be called by his name, provided for by him; and he had done all this and more.

Though her baby face often awakened the bitterest memories, though the touch of her little hand seemed sometimes heavy to him, as if it were laid on his in accusation, though her laugh often sounded painful to his ear, she had grown to him; she had twined herself around his heart-strings; he looked for her when he came home at night, he never turned away from the kiss her rosebud lips pressed against his cheek ere he departed in the morning. He was jealous about her and watchful; he would have her considered: no matter what befell the other children, Rachel must not be neglected.

He saw the antipathy her mother had conceived for her, and he interposed between them, so that no harshness might fall on the little one; that, though helpless, she should be preserved from harm.

And she returned to him what he thus sowed a hundredfold: the thought, the care, the gratitude, the tenderness, the comprehension his wife had never showed, this girl lavished upon him with a prodigality which many and many a time brought an aching remorse to his heart, and recalled memories he would fain have laid at rest for ever.

Between himself and the other children there was but the ordin-

ary affection that in most cases subsists between parents and their offspring; but with Rachel the matter was different. She possessed a nature unlike any of her brothers, unlike her sister also: she had a power of intuition, of sympathy they entirely lacked. Her ways were not theirs, her thoughts were otherwise ordered. She was graver than any of them and more observant, less selfish too, and gifted with a higher species of intelligence.

He could not have lived through all the years without her, he often thought, unknowing how many a one has to continue his weary pilgrimage along the world's highways without the slightest need to lean on; and yet there were times constantly recurring when he considered with affright that if she knew all, if her innocence could understand so terrible and shameful a story, he would behold the love-light fade out of her sweet face, and see her shrink away from his side in an agony of sorrow.

He was beginning to realise a time must come when she would have to be told at least that she was not his child. At first when she was a mere infant, and the idea of loving and lovers remained an indistinct idea in the misty shadows of a remote future, this trouble had not presented itself.

She might never marry—thousands of women never married, never wanted to marry, never were asked to marry; he might die, her mother might die, she might die. So many might and buts and ifs and possibilities were on the board when her life's game commenced, that it seemed useless to speculate concerning a mere probability many parents are so eager to consider a certainty. But now the case was very different: she was quite grown up; she

would marry, he felt sure, or at all events she would be sought in marriage. He had known this with all the power of sudden conviction from the day he told her mother he hoped she never would be wooed or wed. When he bought the house in Palace Gardens he felt he was taking an important step towards a bitter end; but he did not mean to hesitate on that account. Once the subject was forced upon him—and it had been so forced by his wife, whose motives in thus doing happened to be far different from any which could have influenced him—he gave the matter his most earnest consideration.

The girl could not be shut up in a nunnery. If such power had lain with him, Sir John would not have exercised it. She must be introduced to society, and then, whatever consequences followed, he could only face one by one as they presented themselves.

None save those able to sympathise with the shy reserve, the unpretending modesty, the retiring temperament of this man, who, even if all things had gone well with him, would always have preferred a life of quiet domesticity to the throng and bustle of an existence passed amongst crowds, can even faintly imagine what this determination cost; but he accepted it as he accepted many other things, as a matter of duty, in the execution of which he had no choice.

He could not offer expiation to the father; but it was competent for him to try to make the daughter's life happy. At whatever sacrifice to himself he resolved to keep that aim steadily in view.

'I will do my duty by Rachel, whatever comes,' he thought; and thus it chanced even ordinary acquaintances remarked,

'Though the eldest, she is the Benjamin in that family.'

'It is strange Sir John seems to consider her so much more than he does his sons.'

Strange indeed!

But then they did not know, they never knew. Sir John was thinking about her as he wended his way homeward. While he walked slowly under the trees in Kensington he wondered how long the evil day would be deferred, when and where she would meet her fate.

'Heaven send,' murmured the sad heart, 'he may be an honest man, and one not disposed to think the sins of the parents should be visited by poor humanity upon the heads of the children. Other girls have married well, other girls whose mothers—' and he drifted out again on that sad gray sea, the waves of which were always ebbing and flowing around his life, rolling ever over the sands, and washing memories of the long-ago like corpses on the shore.

He felt very weary when he reached Palace Gardens; dull, and tired, and out of sorts. As he glanced up at the stately house, at the long lines of windows, he wondered what wealth had done for him, what wealth did for any one, that men should so court its possession.

He had beheld more happiness in the old manes lying amongst the hills, in modest homes set far away from riches and fashion, than it was ever his lot to meet with in the world's high places.

Passing even through the meaner streets of London neighbourhoods, where his business rarely led him, he remembered how the children ran to meet their parents, how mothers took little dirty bundles of humanity to their bosom, and kissed the smudged and smeared faces which were lovelier

to them than if they had been little lords and ladies dressed in all their best.

He recollected one night following up Cheapside a man and a woman who must have attracted his attention mightily at the time, for he never subsequently quite forgot them.

The man was a tall, long-limbed, loose-built fellow—a navy probably—at all events one who evidently gained his living not by the exercise of skilled labour, but at the cost of downright hard work. He was dressed in his working clothes; was returning home, very likely, after a day of physical toil. The woman was a small slight creature of his own rank, clad likewise in her everyday apparel: a cotton gown, an old plaid shawl, a straw bonnet that had seen service: a husband and wife who, no doubt, at times knew what the pinch of poverty meant, but who were not poverty-stricken.

Most likely they never had possessed five pounds at any one time in their lives; it seemed almost certain they never could own such a sum. Amongst well-dressed well-to-do people they pursued their way in silence, not stopping to look in at shop-windows, not passing remarks on the sights which met their eyes—the throng of vehicles, the rush of pedestrians; for Cheapside was then a much more busy and attractive thoroughfare than it is now—they passed along, considered of no account; not regarded by the people they met, but still *hand in hand*.

The sight produced a deep impression upon Mr. Moffat—he was not Sir John at that time. The incident recurred to his memory as he turned in at the gates of Holyrood House.

Not all his money had been

able to purchase for him anything like that. He remembered a book some one gave to his sister when she was a girl, called the *Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man*; and he dreamily thought there was more truth in the double title than many people imagined. He walked up to the door and put his key in the latch, and was about to turn it in the wards, when the lock was opened from within; the door swung slowly back on its hinges, as if by its own volition, for no one appeared on the threshold or in the hall; then a head was thrust cautiously out from behind, a bright pair of eyes sparkled with delight at witnessing his astonishment, a peal of rippling laughter broke the silence, and a pair of soft white hands clasped him round the neck.

‘Why, Rachel!’ he cried, in astonishment.

‘Like a bad shilling, papa.’

‘My dear, when did you come home?’ he asked.

‘Half an hour ago, papa.’

‘And why?’ he continued, still utterly lost in amazement.

‘They have got scarlatina down at Ferndale,’ she explained, ‘and would not let me stop. I wanted to stay and help—it is poor little Flossy—but the doctor said no; and O, papa, I was so thankful to find you were still in town! We shall have one delightful evening all alone together at any rate.’

‘Ever so many if you like, Rachel,’ he answered, his face reflecting a little of the sunshine she seemed to have brought into the house with her. ‘I won’t go to Lancashire now at all.’

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CHAPTER XXV.

OUT OF TOWN.

At Scarborough Lady Moffat was enjoying herself greatly, after a joyless, dissatisfied, discontented fashion. She found herself all at once that which she had certainly never been before at a watering-place—a person of some distinction.

Miss Banks at once instituted herself as leader, decided where they were to stay, what they were to do, the things they were to see, how they were to amuse themselves. There, as in Kensington, she knew tribes of people; all good—not, perhaps, in the City sense of the slang phrase, or in the meaning unsophisticated persons might be inclined to attach to the words, but in the cant of society. They were 'quite the best'—'in a right rank'—ladies and gentlemen it was 'more than safe' to know; being assured of which facts upon so sound an authority, Lady Moffat was graciously pleased to express the pleasure she felt in making their acquaintance.

Miss Banks had an eminently simple plan for enhancing the greatness of those she called friends; she multiplied their possessions by five. It was not too little, and she found it not too much. Thus if a man were the happy owner of an estate bringing in two thousand a year, Miss Banks said his rent-roll was ten; if a girl had a *dot* of ten thousand pounds, Miss Banks remarked that, with her fifty thousand, she ought to marry well. In these cases, however, she had some basis of fact upon which to erect her superstructure of fiction. The Moffats were in a different category. Sir John might be worth a million, or worth a million less than nothing. She did not know

anything of his affairs, and Lady Moffat could not enlighten her.

'I know nothing of business,' said that admirable person, 'and I have never been in his office in my life.'

'Just like poor dear Mrs. Seaton,' said Miss Banks, with an approving and appreciative smile; but she thought:

'How wonderful it is that all these women, who are dependent upon trade for the bread they eat, and the wine they drink, and the luxuries they enjoy (and where would any one find women able to command so many!), not merely profess to feel indifferent, but actually are indifferent, to the source whence the money on which they live is derived!'

'Sir John is reticent about such matters, I should imagine,' went on Miss Banks aloud, after a pause.

'He does not talk about the City, if that is what you mean,' answered Lady Moffat; 'but then, to be sure, he knows I should not understand him if he did.'

'I often notice that gentlemen who are enormously wealthy do not care to speak about their money; and Sir John, no doubt, is very wealthy indeed.'

'I can't say, I am sure,' answered Lady Moffat. 'I think he must be, though. He was rich when I first knew him, and he must have been getting richer every day since then.'

Here was a golden opportunity, and Miss Banks pounced upon it as a City Arab might on a sovereign. Never before, never once, had Lady Moffat alluded to old times.

'Where did you meet him first?' she asked, in accents full of tender interest. 'At some charming place in the country, no doubt; or perhaps when you were abroad. I have heard of so many happy

marriages that have come about from people getting to know each other under circumstances where the shackles of this weary social bondage under which we all groan are relaxed.'

Lady Moffat looked at her friend curiously. If the subject had been capable of forming a theme for mirth, she must at that moment have felt amused, so eager was Miss Banks for information, so transparent was her ruse in fishing for what she wanted to obtain.

But the matter chanced to seem the reverse of mirthful in Lady Moffat's eyes. She felt conscious she had made a slip, and hastened to retrieve it.

'I met my husband in London, Miss Banks,' she said, so coldly that any one save the irrepressible spinster must have been frozen into silence.

Not so Miss Banks.

'Law,' she said, 'in London! You can't mean it! And I would have wagered my best brooch you were born in the country.'

'You would not have lost your bet,' answered Lady Moffat, that slow sullen fire kindling in her eyes. 'I was born in the country; but still it so chanced that I met Sir John in London.'

'Up in your teens to see the lions, I suppose?' suggested Miss Banks genially.

'No; I did not see any lions, or come to see them,' retorted Lady Moffat. 'I was staying in London with a relative.'

With a relative! Good Heavens, how close Miss Banks was to the scent! If she could only have guessed the degree of kindred, what a mine she might have sprung in Palace Gardens! As matters stood, half the earth could not have separated her more widely from the mystery than was the case. 'Ah, here comes

Edwina!' cried Lady Moffat; and in a moment that young lady, in a yachting costume and wearing a sailor's hat, under which her hair was tossing wildly, entered the room.

'Good gracious, child!' cried Lady Moffat, 'where have you been, and what can you have been doing?'

'Running after a gentleman's hat, mamma,' answered the girl, her cheeks all aglow, her eyes sparkling, her lips parted.

'O my dear!' said Miss Banks, in mild expostulation; in fact, Miss Edwina's ways and manners were dreadful to her.

'What a tomboy!' exclaimed Lady Moffat, but not reprovingly: not having studied *les convenances* for so many years as Miss Banks, the full enormity of Edwina's conduct failed to strike her. Moreover, she was proud of her daughter's beauty, and she was often not sorry to hear the hits that decided young person dealt her new friend.

'I and the boys were on the esplanade enjoying this fine breeze,' explained the girl, turning to her mother, and ignoring Miss Banks' remark as completely as though that lady had not been present; 'there was scarcely another creature out besides ourselves, when we met a gentleman in a bath-chair drawn by a person who looked like a servant-man. Just as we passed, a gust of wind caught his hat, and off it went. The man began to run, and Hal began to run, and Ralph and Jim ran, and then I ran; but the hat ran faster. You never saw such a race! The servant gave up first, and then Hal, but Ralph and Jim and I kept on, and I caught it. I was proud, I can tell you. Hal took it back to the gentleman; and he thanked him and laughed, and said it was the best spin he had ever witnessed.'



Lady Moffat laughed also, Miss Banks groaned.

'Don't you think, Edwina, you are rather too old for such exercises?' she asked.

'No, Miss Banks, I do not,' she answered; and walked out of the room with her chin well up in the air, and her nostrils quivering a little with passion.

'The idea!' she said, as she closed the door after her.

'She is such an impulsive darling!' observed Miss Banks; 'and when she is excited, as she was just now, she is the very image of you, dear Lady Moffat.'

'Yes, she is like me,' agreed her ladyship.

'So different from that sweet quiet Rachel. Whom does she take after? There is scarcely a look of you about her, and she is not in the least like Sir John.'

'No, she is not like Sir John,' answered Lady Moffat; 'I suppose she casts back.'

'Where does she cast back to?' asked Miss Banks—'Sir John's side of the house?'

'O, no, certainly not to the Moffats,' said her mother hurriedly, and with some irritation.

'How stupid I am! I might have known that,' said Miss Banks softly, and in a tone which implied that, whatever other merits Sir John's family possessed, beauty could not be reckoned among them. 'Perhaps she resembles your father?'

'Possibly,' agreed Lady Moffat. 'I do not remember him; but he had, I believe, blue eyes and light hair.'

She spoke indifferently, but she shivered. She knew whose blue eyes looked at her once again out of her daughter's face, whose sunny hair had clustered thick on his forehead, even as the little waves and crinkles lay caressingly on that of his only child.

'Was your mother as beautiful as you?' asked Miss Banks innocently. She was devoured with a desire to know who Lady Moffat's parents had been, and why her ladyship's name was not even mentioned in that book which may be well called the 'secular Bible.'

Lady Moffat's cheeks burned. Miss Banks was getting very near a mystery now—one with which even Sir John was not acquainted. Brusque in her frankness as her ladyship was and had always been, she knew how to keep her own secrets, and she consequently never informed her husband she resembled her mother in other respects besides appearance.

'She was very handsome.' The words were nothing, but the manner was something.

'Pray do tell me about her,' exclaimed Miss Banks. 'I am sure she must have been charming.'

'I do not remember her at all,' said Lady Moffat.

'Died so young. Dear me, how sad!' cried the other sympathetically.

There was a pause—just the merest pause, a shifting glance in Lady Moffat's eyes, a nervous twitch of her mouth—and then she answered quite composedly,

'I lost both father and mother when I was quite a baby.'

'Poor child!' murmured Miss Banks.

Lady Moffat opened her lips to say something, and then shut them again.

'I wonder when luncheon will be ready,' was the next observation she vouchsafed; 'really this sea-air makes one dreadfully hungry.'

At luncheon, however, Miss Banks noticed she ate very little, but drank two glasses of wine, quite an unusual thing for her to do; for she did not much like wine,

and had hitherto not led a life of such excitement as was likely to cause her to have recourse to either sedatives or stimulants.

In the afternoon Lady Moffat complained of headache, and went to lie down. Edwina, as usual, started out with her brothers. Miss Banks, left alone, began to think. Any one coming into the room would have imagined she was merely knitting quietly, counting her stitches, and absorbed in her work; but the lady's mind was otherwise engaged.

'What in the world is queer about that woman?' she asked herself; 'there is some secret in her family history, which I wish I could find out. However, it won't do to ask any more questions, I see that plainly. I have made her fidgety already. I never met any one like her before, so shrewd and so dull, so sharp and so stupid, and with such a tremendous love of power. Well, let Sir John be what he will, I should not think he has found existence with her ladyship a bed of roses.'

And at that very moment Lady Moffat was wearily wishing she had not asked Miss Banks to accompany her to Scarborough. 'I do not like her so much as I thought,' she decided. 'She is too fond of meddling—she is a poking, peering, prying, ugly old maid.'

Next day, however, an event occurred which induced both ladies to sink their differences. Walking slowly in the forenoon along the shore—Edwina, fresh from her dip in the sea, following in their wake, her hair streaming down her back, and a huge dog, with which she had made friends, greeting her with frantic demonstrations of joy—the sun shining brightly upon the sea, still somewhat wave-tossed after the summer storm that had swept over it the

previous day—they came upon a bath-chair drawn aside from the bustle of the sands, in which, sheltered by a jutting rock from the heat of the early noontide, sat an invalid, accompanied by a gentleman friend, and attended by a servant, who, now his assistance could temporarily be dispensed with, stood a little apart.

Miss Banks, looking at the tableau carelessly, suddenly uttered a little exclamation of surprise, and bowed to the stranger leaning against the rock, who raised his hat in acknowledgment of her salutation.

Then the eyes of the gentleman in the bath-chair falling on Miss Edwina, he recognised her, and moved as if by an irresistible impulse he smiled, as he also lifted his hat.

Half laughing, while blushing, feeling in a moment shy and abashed, the girl returned a wise little nod, and hurried on after her seniors.

They had not got twenty paces away, however, before the gentleman Miss Banks knew was at their side.

'Forgive me, dear Miss Banks,' he began; 'but I no sooner see you than I come to ask a favour. I had no idea you were in Scarborough.'

'I have been here a fortnight, Captain,' she answered, stopping; 'and you?'

'Two days.'

'What delightful weather!' remarked Miss Banks.

'What a nice day yesterday was!' he answered.

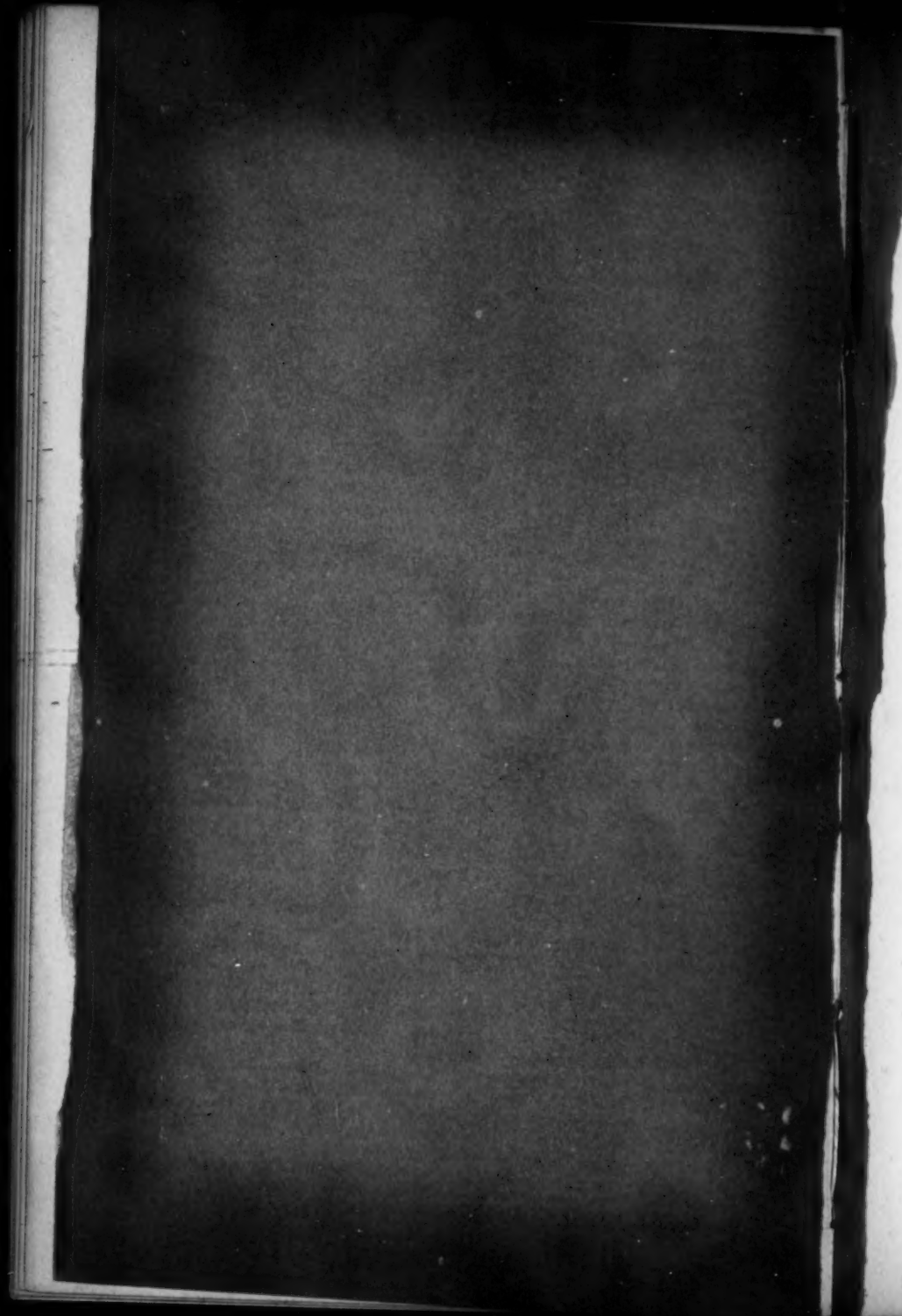
'I never crossed the threshold of our hotel,' she said.

'Nor I,' he replied. 'But that brings me back to the question I wanted to ask. Who is that jolly little girl?' and he indicated with a look Miss Edwina, who was walking demurely beside her



He indicated with a look Miss Editha.

See 'The Mystery in Palace Gardens,' p. 100.



mamma, and shaking out her tresses to the sun and air.

'That "jolly" little girl is the daughter of Sir John Moffat,' explained Miss Banks, in a tone of severe reprehension.

'By Jove! and who is Sir John Moffat?'

'Really, Captain, I am afraid I cannot add further to your information,' answered Miss Banks stiffly.

'Come, Miss Banks, you must not be cross with me,' said the individual addressed as Captain; 'and you used always to be so good-natured and forgiving! Are you angry at my calling your young lady a jolly little girl? Fact is, I only adopted the Viscount's phrase. He was so taken with her yesterday; he talked about her at intervals all the evening; and now nothing will serve him but an introduction, if it can be managed. You will humour his whim, won't you? Remember what a wreck he is.'

'You forget,' said Miss Banks, not much appeased, 'I am as much at sea concerning your Viscount as you about Sir John Moffat.'

'Why, I thought you knew all about him; you used to be hand and glove with some of the Chesunt people, I am certain.'

'Do you mean that that man in the bath-chair is Lord Chesunt?' asked Miss Banks. 'Why, I thought he was abroad—gone abroad to die!'

'He is going abroad,' answered the Captain; 'but I don't think he will die just yet. If he could be roused, if his interest could be awakened, if he could by any means be persuaded he is really a very fortunate individual, I think he might be well enough. Failing all that—' the Captain paused and shrugged his shoulders expressively.

Miss Banks did not speak; she

knew when to talk and when to keep silence.

'Now, won't you manage,' entreated the Captain, 'to let him know that child? Upon my soul, Miss Banks,' he went on, waxing desperate, 'I do think she has done him good already. How he did laugh, to be sure, when he was telling me about the three of them scurrying along after his hat! "What a jolly little girl she is!" he said. "What a delightful little woman she will be!"'

Miss Banks had thought it all out by this time. She did not like Captain Battersley. There had been between them, in days gone by, certain little passages of arms, in which she always came off worsted. Dangerous as a friend, fatal as a foe, she had for many years tried to keep a wide distance between herself and the gallant officer; but in the present instance she knew it would be of no avail trying to elude his request. By hook or by crook he would compass his design, and it was better to bow to the inevitable and to make a virtue of necessity.

'You had better,' she said, therefore, 'tell all this to Lady Moffat herself. She is a very amiable person.' Miss Banks made this statement without the suspicion even of a smile. She told untruths as a matter of business, and the humour of some of them never struck her. 'As amiable as her husband is rich. It is extremely likely she will take the child back to speak to his lordship now.'

'A thousand thanks,' cried the Captain. 'And so,' he went on, as they hurried along, 'this Sir John Somebody is very rich, is he?'

'Sir John Moffat is very rich indeed, Captain Battersley,' answered Miss Banks.

'And where does he live when he is at home?' asked the officer.

'In Palace Gardens,' said Miss Banks.

'Where is that?' inquired Captain Battersley.

'I declare you are too bad!' retorted the lady; and, dexterously shifting the position of her sunshade, she turned her gaze seaward, utterly excluding the offending Captain from her bodily contemplation.

'Why, what now?' he asked. 'What have I said or done amiss? You seem to think I am as well posted up in new baronets and new localities as yourself. I know all the old streets as I know all the old titles, but when you take me beyond my radius, I am lost. Where is, or are, Palace Gardens?'

'You know perfectly well,' she answered irritably.

'I do not know,' he said. 'Anywhere near Palace-yard?'

Miss Banks did not reply. They were now close to Lady Moffat and her daughter, who paused as they drew near.

'May I introduce Captain Battersley to you, Lady Moffat?' began Miss Banks. 'He is a friend of the gentleman whose hat Edwina and her brothers rescued yesterday.'

The Captain bowed and told his story—gave a pathetic account of the state of Lord Chesunt's health, and of the boon any distraction from the consideration of his ailments proved to the sick man.

'Will you allow him to make your acquaintance?' he entreated.

'He has taken a fancy for knowing Miss Moffat, and he is just like a child—frets if one crosses his whim. I feel that I ought to make a thousand apologies for preferring such a request; but if you take into consideration the excep-

tional circumstances of the case, I am sure you will forgive me.'

Lady Moffat had no objection in the world to knowing Lord Chesunt; quite the contrary. Lords had not been plentiful in her world—indeed, she had never spoken to one in all her life—and the opportunity presented seemed far too good to be lost. She wanted to know people of high degree; she was restlessly anxious to increase the number of her desirable acquaintances. The society she once thought very grand and good she now despised. She desired to go on climbing higher and higher, believing that in some yet loftier sphere she would attain that happiness she had never yet compassed, and feeling if there were not security in the society of the upper ten, safety existed nowhere on the face of the earth.

'I shall be very happy to become acquainted with Lord Chesunt,' she said; and though there was no elation in her tone or manner, there was a sparkle in her eye, which the Captain read correctly. 'We know his cousin, I think,' which was a bold statement, since she had only spoken twice to that gentleman.

Captain Battersley laughed.

'You mean the clergyman, I suppose,' he said. 'That fact had better, I fancy, be kept discreetly in the background. The mention of his cousin acts upon my friend like a red rag on a turkey cock.'

'Why?' asked Lady Moffat, with charming directness.

'People don't like their next heirs, as a rule, particularly when they themselves happen to be in bad health,' he answered. 'It is annoying to reflect another fellow will come in for a lot of good things if you die. And though Chesunt won't take care of himself, he can't endure the idea of anybody stepping into his shoes when he has to



leave them off. Therefore, I venture to suggest that, his cousin being an unpleasant subject, the topic should be avoided.'

'You hear that, Edwina,' said Miss Banks severely.

'Yes, I hear,' answered the girl; and, looking at her, Captain Battersley knew she meant to introduce Mr. Woodham's name the very first opportunity.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### AT THE GRAND HOTEL.

THE acquaintance thus begun was not permitted to languish for want of constant intercourse.

Staying at the same hotel, Viscount Chesunt spent a great portion of his time with his new friends; and when he did not feel inclined for their society—for he had moods of evil temper and seasons of terrible depression—Captain Battersley kept the ball moving, and made himself, as Lady Moffat said, 'very agreeable indeed.'

That gallant gentleman admired Sir John's wife immensely. 'A splendid woman!' he declared to Miss Banks, who was not backward in repeating all his compliments to her hostess. 'Her beauty is imperial,' he said. 'I do not know when I saw any one so handsome! Where did the worthy knight pick her up?'

Miss Banks did not answer. She knew the covert insolence which underlay these figures of speech, and she had no weapon save silence to keep that insolence from finding open expression.

'I beg your pardon,' he apologised; 'do you happen to know where Sir John Moffat met with his wife?'

'I do not,' answered Miss Banks.

'Yet you have a faculty of finding out most things.'

Again Miss Banks vouchsafed no reply.

'There is a mystery, I take it,' he went on.

'I have not the faintest idea. Why should there be a mystery?'

'Why should there not?' he answered.

'What makes you think there is?' she asked.

'Can't tell; there is something about her I don't understand. Come, Miss Banks, what is it? We know each other so well, there need not be any secrets between us.'

'There is no secret at all, so far as I am aware,' she answered.

'Really?' he asked.

'And truly,' she replied. 'She is not very communicative about her antecedents; but then that is nothing unusual with people who have risen.'

'They have risen, then?'

'She has, I fancy. Sir John's family connections are respectable enough.'

'Never seen any of her relations?'

'Never. Nor of his, for that matter.'

'Who was she?'

'I don't know.'

'This grows interesting,' commented the Captain. 'Fancy Miss Banks living on terms of intimate friendship with a lady for—How long have you visited with them?'

'Six months, I suppose.'

'And at the end of that time knowing literally nothing of her antecedents. I could not have believed it! Lady Moffat must be cleverer than I thought.'

'She is not at all clever,' said Miss Banks.

'Ah, that's a woman's view of the matter, just as it is a female

delusion that Chesunt can be secured for the little girl. My dear soul, it is of no use trying to play a game of that kind with him. He is not going to marry; and if he were, he would not marry our boyish young friend. You see, she could bring him nothing but money, and he does not want money. She is pretty; but, good gracious, there are hundreds of pretty women in the world, and in his own rank too. You are making quite a mistake. Of course, it is no business of mine, and I only tell you because it always seems to me a pity for persons to waste time. You had much better go in for the cousin. Ah, I see that idea has already occurred to you. Sir John's money-bags could be useful to him, and he has a very good chance of the title, though he may have to wait some time for it.'

'I suspect you do not want Lord Chesunt to marry,' said Miss Banks, who could not resist giving this tit for his tat.

'I? You don't suppose, my dear soul, I am going to lead this life of slavery for ever? Thank you. My berth is no sinecure; and what is worse, it is not profitable. The wrong sort of person, my lord, to get much out of. It makes no difference to me whether he marries or stays single; but he won't marry. He never cared for any woman but one; and, unstable in everything else, he remains faithful to that first love who was faithless. Not even to spite his cousin will he take a wife.'

'What a singular idea!'

'Isn't it? He must have been devotedly attached to her. It was a boy-and-girl affair; but you know all about it, of course.'

'No, not all. Of course every one is aware he was disappointed, but I never heard particulars.'

'They were neighbours,' explained Captain Battersley, 'I believe. You remember he was poor as a church-mouse, and had not, in his younger days, the slightest hope of ever succeeding to the title or the property—a very ineligible fellow indeed. He had known her from a child—they had grown up together; she was the only person, he says, who ever understood him, and they were undoubtedly very fond of each other. Her parents would not hear of the match; nevertheless, the young folks vowed to be constant, and he went abroad with his regiment and she stayed at home. The first news which greeted his return was that she had married, and the next that he was Viscount Chesunt.'

'Where is she now?'

'In India. Her husband is an enormously rich fellow. He was ordered to England for his health: saw her, proposed, was accepted. So much for constancy.'

'And what is really the matter with him?'

'A very prosaic disease—he drinks too much. The doctors say he can't last if he goes on as he has been doing, and I am striving to keep him straight, but it's not an easy task. Now you have a map of the country, my dear Miss Banks.'

'I thought there was something of the sort,' she said meditatively.

'If you lived with him you might be sure,' answered Captain Battersley. 'It is a perfect madness while it lasts—a wild insanity. He is better, though—he is certainly better; and I am in hopes living abroad may do wonders for him.'

'He is going abroad, then, certainly?'

'Yes, in a few weeks' time. So, you see, there is not much chance

of catching him for that audacious little romp.'

Miss Banks did not feel satisfied on this point, but she held her peace.

The days went by, and Captain Battersley grew quite intimate with the Moffat family. The Viscount had one very bad attack, and while he was confined to his own apartments his friend came and went to the rooms occupied by Lady Moffat and Miss Banks as though he were one of that party.

'Don't she and her husband agree?' asked the Captain, who really admired Lady Moffat immensely, and felt most curious about her.

'He seems to let her have her own way in everything,' said Miss Banks.

'Why doesn't he come to Scarborough, then?'

'I fancy he has enough of her at home.'

'Then they do quarrel? I felt sure of it.'

'No, they do not quarrel; but she is a restless woman—I dare say you have noticed that; and he is so quiet, I think it must wear him a little.'

'What is he like—mentally and physically, I mean?'

'He is many years older than she, and looks his age. He is grave, reserved, gentleman-like; says as little as he can avoid; does not care for display or society or amusement. He is not ambitious. It is much easier to say what he is not, than what he is: a good sort of person, I think, but not easy to get intimate with.'

'Rich, you say?'

'Enormously, like all City folks.'

The Captain laughed. 'I know some fellows in the City who would be only too glad to find themselves even a little rich; but let that pass. Now what do you

suppose this good Sir John will give his daughter? A hundred thousand?'

'I can't tell; that is a great deal of money. Say half.'

'Well, we will say half. I might do worse myself;' and the speaker looked straight in Miss Banks' face. 'What do you think?' he added, finding she made no reply.

'That she might do a great deal better,' answered the lady boldly.

'True, I don't dispute the correctness of that statement; but still, think the matter over; give the subject your best consideration.'

Miss Banks gave the subject her best consideration as she walked homeward, and decided it would not do; indeed, she had her misgivings that the Scarborough business, so far as she was concerned, must be regarded as a complete mistake.

Save change of air and free board and lodging, she gained nothing by her expedition—a few useless presents, a few revived acquaintanceships. What were these to set against the fact that she was getting dreadfully tired of Lady Moffat; that she felt she was a woman of whom little could be made directly—who has 'no gratitude and no sense,' thought Miss Banks; 'who is as secret as the grave, and as mean at heart as a miser?'

Lady Moffat was not the person to give her purse into the hands of any one and say 'Pay.' She liked power; she loved personally to feel what money could do for her. Miss Banks could lead her into extravagance, but she never got a chance of levying blackmail ere the gold, which was poured out like water, reached tradesmen, who were as greedy and hungry as herself.

'I think I must soon receive a letter requiring my return to town,' decided Miss Banks; and having made up her mind on this point, she redoubled her attentions to Lady Moffat, and rendered herself most amiable and attentive.

One beautiful morning Lady Moffat, Miss Banks, and Captain Battersley all sat talking pleasantly over a late breakfast. It had come to be almost a matter of course that Captain Battersley should join them at that meal, which now was always late.

Lady Moffat could not sleep at night, and was getting into the habit of taking her rest after dawn. By this time she had plenty of acquaintance in Scarborough, and was leading that life of constant gadding about and useless visiting certain to tell upon the health of a woman who had hitherto led the most quiet of existences, and kept the most regular of hours. Her doctor had not the faintest idea as to what was the matter with her, and therefore said she was to pass a considerable time in the open day, and keep herself interested and amused, and free from all anxiety.

Nothing loth to carry out these directions, Lady Moffat, aided and abetted by Miss Banks and the many 'delightful' people who chanced by the 'greatest good fortune' to be at the same period staying at Scarborough, was ever foremost in projects for pleasure, and in suggesting parties, aquatic and otherwise.

She was not very fond of the water, it is true, but, as she remarked, 'anything is better than staying indoors.'

They were a merry party at breakfast on the morning in question. Lady Moffat often declared Captain Battersley amused her more than any one she ever knew.

He had never a good word to speak in their absence about man or woman; perhaps this was the chief reason of his agreeability.

They were talking very earnestly about a picnic-party Lady Moffat intended to give. Miss Banks was pencilling down the names of those who should be invited, and Captain Battersley was diversifying the monotony of that proceeding by comments upon the different persons mentioned. Young and old, merely rich or merely well-born, good and bad, handsome and ugly, it was all the same to this well-dressed, easy-mannered cynic.

'You are too hard upon them,' said Miss Banks at length, in expostulation, when, after pulling a whole family to pieces, he reverted to the shortcomings of a respectable old grandfather, whose only sin chanced to be a too small acquaintance with foreign tongues, and an undue fondness for pronouncing French and German and Italian names in 'plain English fashion,' which was, he said, 'quite good enough for him.' 'They are very nice homely sort of people, and I do not like to hear them ridiculed.'

Captain Battersley looked at her steadily. He was short-sighted, and the glass he wore almost constantly fixed in his right eye made the sort of scrutiny with which he favoured the lady more impressive.

'Good gracious,' he exclaimed, 'can I believe my ears! Is Saul amongst the prophets!'

'I do not think it is a sin for a man who was born about eighty years ago to be a little ignorant of modern languages, if that is what you mean,' said Miss Banks stoutly. 'People did not know so much, were not in the way of learning so much, then, as they are

now; besides, when he was young he had not time, I daresay, to study such things.'

'I daresay not; at that remote period I think he told me he was employed as a sweeper—could it be a sweeper? yes, I think so—in a cotton-mill.'

'All the more credit is due to him, then, for having risen to the position he occupies.'

'I will not endeavour to dispute so obvious a truism,' said Captain Battersley, bowing. 'There is no knowing where to have our fair friend,' he added, turning to Lady Moffat. 'She blows so hot and she blows so cold. One day she is enthusiastic concerning the merits of a new acquaintance; the next she discovers he is but mortal, and blames him for failing to reach the stature of a saint. Now it seems to me a middle sort of course is better, for if one sees both the defects and the virtues—'

'Better leave out the last word,' suggested Miss Banks; 'you never see a virtue.'

Lady Moffat laughed; she liked to hear the two sparring; it never occurred to her that between them she might get a blow—that either could ever find anything but good to say of a person whose company they appeared so much to enjoy, whose society they so sedulously affected.

'Do you think your friend will be well enough to join us?' she asked.

'Who—Chesunt? O yes, I'll make him come; he is like Miss Banks, he loves "fresh woods and pastures new." The grandpapa's account of his foreign tour will delight him beyond measure. Shall we proceed with the list?'

'I think it is almost long enough,' said Miss Banks, looking pensively at the names she had jotted down. 'Just attend for a moment, please, whilst I read, and

then if there is any one, any desirable one, that you find I have omitted, please tell me.'

'Sir John Moffat.'

It was not Captain Battersley or Lady Moffat who supplied this omission, but the waiter, who threw open the door of the breakfast-room and announced Sir John Moffat.

If a ghost had appeared suddenly before the trio they could scarcely have been more startled.

Miss Banks dropped her pencil. Captain Battersley surveyed the new arrival in amazement. Lady Moffat half rose from her chair, and then sat down again, murmuring,

'Why, how did you come here?'

It was not a cordial welcome, but it served. Sir John shook hands with his wife and Miss Banks, bowed to the unknown gentleman, and said he had come by the train from York.

'Have you breakfasted?' asked her ladyship.

There was plenty of material on the table for any one who liked cold coffee, cold tea, cold toast, cold bacon, cold eggs, fruit and wine.

Sir John had breakfasted.

'Lovely weather for travelling,' said Captain Battersley, plunging into the conversational abyss.

Yes, the weather was beautiful, Sir John admitted.

'You know Scarborough well, I suppose?' suggested the Captain.

No, Sir John had never seen Scarborough before.

'Ah, well then, you will see it for the first time at what people think its best. I prefer the place in the winter, I must say, however. I am going out shortly, Lady Moffat; is there any commission I can execute for you?'

Lady Moffat was obliged, but she wanted nothing.

'And you, Miss Banks?' asked

Captain Battersley, turning towards the spinster.

'No; I am going out almost immediately myself, thank you.'

'I hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again in the course of the afternoon, Sir John,' said Captain Battersley politely, turning to that gentleman; and without waiting for any reply he left the room, an example followed so speedily by Miss Banks that they encountered each other on the landing.

'Surprised?' asked the other.

'Well, yes, a little.'

'She looked frightened.'

'But she isn't; it is only a way she has.'

'She acts the part very well if it is not natural.'

Meantime the subject of these remarks sat with the sunshine streaming upon her, perfectly silent. She looked at the wrecks strewn the breakfast-table, the remnants of that pleasant feast, the places where her two guests had sat, and spoke not a word.

Sir John's eyes also roamed over the board, and then turned to the sea dancing and quivering below the windows, before he said slowly,

'Who is that person, Mira?'

'That person,' she answered, with not a bad imitation of the officer's own manner, 'is Captain Battersley.'

'How did you get to know him?'

'Through an accident,' she replied slowly and unwillingly, as though the words were drawn out of her mouth against her inclination. 'He is here with Lord Chesunt.'

'You see a great deal of him?'

'Yes, we have grown very intimate with them both.'

'O!' and he drew a long breath, and began studying the pattern of the carpet.

'Have you any other question to

ask?' she said, after a moment's pause.

'Yes;' there was a latent insolence in her tone, but he took no notice of it. 'We had better have these things removed first, however, so that we may not be interrupted.'

'We can go into the next room,' she said; 'you need fear no interruption there.'

She led the way, her skirts sweeping the ground, her head upreared in the air in a manner all too familiar. He knew these signs betokened stormy weather; but he had not come down expecting a calm, and he was prepared for any outburst which might ensue.

'Will this suit you?' she asked, with a scornful glance around the luxurious appointments.

'Very well,' he said; and drawing up an easy-chair for her, he stationed himself beside the window.

'You want to know what brought me down, I suppose?' he began, speaking quietly and gently as usual.

'Yes; and why you came as you did—without letter, without warning, bursting upon me like a thunderclap, just as if you wanted to spy what I was about.'

He looked at her in calm astonishment.

'No thought was further from my mind, Mira,' he said. 'I am not, I hope, much in the habit of spying and prying.'

'O indeed! yet the moment you come here you begin finding fault with my acquaintances.'

'I have not done so as yet,' he replied. 'Still, while we are on that subject I may tell you I decidedly object to Captain Battersley and to Lord Chesunt. They are both men of the worst possible character; and if you must make new acquaintances, I should prefer them to be respectable.'



'You are a judge of that sort of thing, I suppose?'

'Mira,' he said, 'don't let us quarrel; we are not, we never have been, too happy; but surely there is no necessity for us to make ourselves more wretched. I did not come down here to speak about Captain Battersley or Captain anybody. I came merely in answer to your letter asking for more money. Do you know, have you any idea, how much you have spent since you left London?'

'I am not a bookkeeper,' she retorted.

'I ought to have seen you sooner on this subject,' he went on, his voice very kind and low and pained, for he hated having to find fault, and he could not endure talking to her about her sudden extravagance; 'but as I was willing until lately to give you even more than you asked for, since I considered you were, as wives go in these times, moderate in your expenditure and careful in the household, I thought I would send all you wanted while you were here, and then tell you before another summer came round I could not afford to spare so large an amount.'

'Well?' she said, as he paused.

'I meant to have come down long ago,' he said, 'and then I put the evil day off and off. I wrote to you some time since, if you remember, and begged you not to ask me so constantly for remittances. For a little while you refrained from doing so; but of late scarcely a day has passed without a request for money.'

'Because you never sent me enough at once,' she answered.

'Well, altogether you have had enough surely,' he expostulated. 'Just look here, those are the sums I have posted to you; that is the total they come to.'

He held out as he spoke a little

memorandum-book, the first leaves in which were well filled with figures, while the page he kept open showed a formidable amount to have been drawn in so short a time out of the pockets of any man.

She averted her head and began tapping the floor with her foot.

'Do look at it, Mira,' he entreated. 'I do not like to seem stingy; but your own common sense will tell you, if you cast your eye over those figures, that I could not, in justice to myself and the children, allow such an expenditure to continue.'

So suddenly and swiftly she struck the book out of his hand that, as he bent towards her, it smote him in the face and then fell to the floor.

He did not say anything; he lifted it up and put it in his pocket, and then walked twice up and down the room before he could trust himself to speak again. Ah, he could not take his hat now, as he had done in the years gone by. He was bound to her, and he knew it. Through the long, long weary years, by words, tone, manner, she had reminded him too often of his position for there to be much danger of his forgetting it.

Yet there may come a time when even a worm will turn, and that time had arrived for Sir John. As she meant to fight, he would fight. Warfare of any kind was not to his taste; but he felt that if he ever intended to defend his worldly credit, his mercantile honour, the money he had struggled hard to amass, the fortune of his children, the portion he had mentally set aside for Rachel, he must unfurl his standard now. He had arrived meaning peace, and she met him with enmity. He had approached a difficult subject with reluctance, and she treated it and him with

scorn. He had not intended to reproach her for the past, but only to curtail her expenses for the future; and she rejected his first offer of some reasonable capitulation, she received his flag of truce with indignity, and gave him no reason to suppose that any further amicable advances would be treated with greater courtesy.

He stopped at length in the middle of the room and looked at her. She was still gazing out of the window, still ignoring his existence, still, with her face well in profile, keeping her eyes averted from this disturbing presence.

Yes, he looked at her; coldly, dispassionately, critically. She was handsomer than she had ever been—as different as can well be imagined from the beautiful creature he first beheld; but in her prime more lovely, more perfect than even when she stood with the glamour of youth and romance and dawn about her, and the thousand nameless attractions imagination weaves round a pretty woman when her story is still unknown, her faults lying in the background far out of sight of the keenest eyes.

He had seen handsome women since he first met her in the dim twilight of early morning, with the scent of roses and lilies filling all the air, but he had never seen one so handsome as his wife. He had roamed through exhibitions, and sauntered through picture-galleries; but not in one did he ever light on a portrait of any lady so divinely fair as she who had brought all the hopes and aspirations of his life to naught.

How long had the passion he once dignified by the name of love been dead, he wondered? He could not think of it now save as a snare and a delusion, an infatu-

ation and insanity; but looking at her he marvelled wherein the charm had lain for him, what there was in the song which lured him to destruction.

He could not tell; though she was still a beautiful woman, her face attracted him no more. With the years there had grown a dread of it. Very little further provocation would, he felt, change that dread to hatred. With all his heart and all his soul he had tried to do his duty by and to her. For her sake, for that of the husband he had wronged, for conscience' sake, and the truth and the right and the honour, he had been more tender to, more thoughtful for, this wife who had never been thoughtful for him, than husbands usually are to wives they nevertheless hold dear in their innermost hearts, that they love wholly and entirely.

And this was the return he received. Knowing what she knew, remembering things which *could* not be forgotten, she still let the demon with which she was cursed rend her, and defy him.

She wore a morning dress that was a master triumph of simplicity, fashion, and expense, and he noted how its every line and flow, its delicate colours, its pretty bows and trembling ribbons, set off the fairness of her fair face, the graceful curves of her figure. White and lovely were her hands, shaded by creamy-looking ruffles; her hair was thick and luxuriant as of yore; not a wrinkle marked her forehead, not a trace of Time's footprints could be seen upon her face. What was there she had lacked in the past? what was it she desired in the present? Were there not hundreds of women, thousands, millions, who would be thankful for a twentieth part of the money

he was willing she should spend? And why should he hesitate about speaking firmly and with authority when he recollected the poverty wherein he had first seen her, the obscurity from which he knew she had sprung?

He did hesitate, however; partly because he recollected so fully, partly because he disliked and feared a scene.

He knew the fury of the devil which possessed her; he had seen it throw down all reticence and self-respect, and trample on everything a man holds most sacred; he dreaded beholding it let loose, more especially in a strange place, and amongst strange people, who might, perchance, have never seen such a tempest of rage as rarely disturbs the proprieties of modern domestic life.

Still the question must be raised, the matter, if possible, settled; and having so decided, he returned to the spot he had occupied previously, and recommenced his argument.

'I used to imagine that statements about a man being ruined by his home expenditure were the purest of fictions—that is by home expenditure, unless he himself elected to keep open house and live in a wildly extravagant manner.'

She did not turn her eyes from the sea, or move her position even by the sixteenth of an inch; but she laughed.

Now when amused by Captain Battersley, or flattered by Miss Banks, Lady Moffat's laugh was not disagreeable; but on such occasions as the present it sounded intensely unpleasant. It was a short sneering laugh, like an exclamation or an interjectionary comment, and was capable of expressing at once contempt, ridicule, defiance, and anger.

Sir John was well acquainted

with every modulation of that laugh. It had not seemed to him so dreadful when she was another man's wife—perhaps then he had heard it less seldom; but since the doubtful happiness was his of calling her his own, the sound of it was to him what the war-whoop of the Indian might be to a peaceful settler in the back-woods.

Nevertheless he held steadily on.

'But it is quite evident to me now,' he proceeded, 'that a person might become seriously embarrassed, or at least deeply involved, without being in the slightest degree aware of the fact. Since we entered Holyrood House, independent of the cost of alterations and furniture, and entirely exclusive of what may be called ordinary household expenses, we have spent something like nine thousand pounds.'

'And I daresay you have often made nine thousand pounds in a day,' she said.

He smiled; though she was angry and he vexed, he could not help smiling.

'Indeed no, Mira,' he answered. 'Mine is not a speculative business; there are no great gains in it, as there are no enormous risks. Never in a day, never in a week, and but once, so far as I remember, in a month, did I make even half the sum; but that is quite beside the question. I cannot afford to live at the rate we have been doing. No moderate business would stand it; and the sooner we revert to a more modest and economical style of house-keeping, the better it will be for all of us.'

'I never again intend to live on cheeseparings,' answered her ladyship, with a little fluttering hurry, which caused the ribbons on her dress to tremble and stir

as though they too felt emotion.

'When you are asked to do so,' he said, 'it will be time enough for you to refuse, will it not?'

She turned her head now and looked at him. She placed a white hand one on each arm of the chair, and gazed in his face, with the evil light of old smouldering in her eyes—lying there, as Doctor Dilton said, like lightning within a cloud.

'We may as well understand each other,' she began. 'Till quite lately I never knew how rich you were; or, indeed, that you were rich at all. If my sight had not been opened I might have gone on for ever grubbing along, managing and contriving while you were enjoying yourself out in the world; making yourself a great person; giving to your Lancashire operatives and London poor; dining with your earls and your lord mayors, and the Queen, for aught I know to the contrary. But I will do it no longer. Life is not so long one need waste any part of it. For years and years I have been kept mewed up, seeing nothing, knowing no one, going nowhere. If I do not take some pleasure out of existence now, I shall be an old woman before I have a chance of ever feeling I was a young one.'

'What have you lacked that I could give you?' asked Sir John.

'What have I had? would be a better question,' she retorted. 'Till just lately have I ever had the chance of visiting or going about like other women? I was not taken with you anywhere. When you were at dinner-parties I was at home with the children. I thought it a treat to go to tea at the Rector's. Your money was no advantage to me. I wore dowdy dresses because I knew no

better. I went on foot, though you could well have kept your carriage long ago; and now when, no thanks to you, an opportunity presents itself for enjoying life a little, you come down and tell me you won't have it!'

'And I will not,' said Sir John, as he stood, looking grim and gray, confronting his beautiful wife, who had risen in her passion, and seemed now in the bright sunlight a visible embodiment of Fury. He was quite firm; pale, but resolved; grim, but determined. 'I will not,' he repeated; 'I won't have it!'

Then she broke out; the paroxysm was sure to come. Under the circumstances it could no more be kept back than a fit of epilepsy, no more be controlled than an outburst of smallpox. She scolded, she stormed, she raved; the only marvel seemed she did not assault and murder; and then she swept out of the room, knocking down a chair, and sweeping a cloth off the table in her progress.

It was over; the storm had come and gone, and Sir John stood living and alone. No worse tempest had ever threatened to annihilate him, and yet he was in safety and scathless. This was what he had done for himself; this was what he had commenced to compass on the morning when he walked due west.

Time had blunted the first terror such hurricanes evoked, but could never reconcile him to the domestic climate when they might be expected.

He knew now if there were one thing on earth he would have valued more than another it was a happy fireside, where peace sat tranquil, where some dear woman smiled to see him return, where some kindly face brightened at his approach as it could brighten

at the approach of none other upon earth.

But it was not to be. Early enough he had not considered the quality of the grain he was sowing. At first he had not reckoned it would cover all the fields of his future, and that the harvest it yielded would require the best years of his later life to garner into the granaries he had built.

Half unconscious of what he did, he picked up the chair she had overturned, and carefully replaced the cloth, smoothing out its folds with unaccustomed hands as he laid it on the table. An on-looker might almost have guessed something of the man's nature from the way he strove to conceal all trace of his wife's wild paroxysm of passion, to hide the evidence of her temper, to keep strangers from knowing she had permitted herself to be so disturbed. The books that had fallen with the cover, the nicknacks lying scattered on the floor, the vase filled with flowers, which had not broken, though the water contained in it was spilt,—all these things Sir John rearranged as best he could; and then he went back and stood by the window, looking out over the sea dancing in the sunlight, his heart heavy in his bosom the while—heavy as lead.

He felt determined, but he was sorrowful; and as he watched the bright beams glittering on the surface of the ocean, and thought of the man who had been swallowed by the waves, and whose requiem was sung by the winds and the billows, his very soul sickened by reason of the past which lay behind and the future which spread before him.

Ere long the door opened, and Edwina looked in, searching for her mother.

'Why, papa, who would have

thought of seeing you?' she cried, running to him and flinging her arms round his neck. Then she held him at arm's length, and made believe to be incredulous. 'It is papa after all. And how are you, papa, and how is Rachel? You have not brought her, I am afraid, have you?'

'No,' Sir John said, 'I have not brought her; but she is very well. We have been Darby and Joan, you know, together for ever so long.'

'Dear old Joan,' murmured the girl. 'Where is mamma? You have seen her, of course?'

'Yes,' he answered, 'I have seen her; but I don't know where she is now.'

'I'll try if I can find her,' exclaimed Edwina; and she left the room, only to return in a couple of minutes, and say with a pout, 'Winter (Lady Moffat's maid) 'told her mamma was gone out, dressed all in a hurry, and left word she might not be back until dinner-time.'

Having vouchsafed which information, Miss Edwina went and drummed in an absent and unladylike manner on the window-pane, while her father stood looking on.

Miss Edwina's *personnel* did not exactly please him. He was not given to study his feminine belongings as regards their attire over critically or carefully, but the effect of his youngest daughter's appearance grated upon his sense of fitness.

Her dress was too short, her boots were too thick, her ankles too visible. She wore the sailor's hat before mentioned, and besides the bodice of her gown she apparently wore nothing over her shoulders. Externally she certainly did not, save a cloud of hair tossed and untidy, wild as the mane of a colt just taken

in from grass, crazy as that of Ophelia after she had stuck sticks through her dishevelled tresses.

In silence Sir John contemplated the young lady. Always a hoyden, she seemed to him at that moment a wilder hoyden than he had ever before imagined. Always wanting in repose, she looked then storm-tossed and weather-beaten. Sunburnt almost beyond credibility, her blue-striped costume stained and discoloured with grubbing amongst the sand and being splashed with sea-water, her hands brown and gloveless, her collar soiled, her cuffs limp and tossed, Miss Edwina certainly appeared an anachronism in that state of life in which she was placed, and the fact forced itself upon her father's attention.

'Wina,' he said at last, after he had exhausted every defect in her dress and manner and listened to the tune she was discontentedly drumming on the glass till he felt its inconsequence irritating his already irritable nerves, 'how long would it take the maid to pack up your things?'

She had turned towards him and ceased her musical exercises at the sound of her name.

'Not long, papa. Why?'

'Because I am going to take you back to town with me.'

She flushed scarlet. Through the sunburn and the freckles he could see the blood mantling her cheeks and mounting to her forehead. There was one thing, however, Sir John's children knew—namely, that when he spoke to them he meant to be obeyed. He did not often speak; but if he did so, there was no appeal.

'Very well, papa,' she said resignedly. 'Shall I tell Winter now?'

'You had better,' he answered.

'I want to start as soon as you can get ready.'

With a crestfallen and humiliated air the girl took her short dress, her thick boots, her streaming hair, her sailor's hat across the room. At the door she paused.

'Papa,' she pleaded, 'mayn't I have something to eat before we go? I'm so hungry.'

He did not feel much inclined for merriment, but he could not help smiling at the rueful tone in which she spoke.

'Don't make yourself uneasy, child,' he answered. 'I have no intention of starving you.'

Still very sorrowful, but with that one ray of comfort breaking athwart the gloom, Edwina betook herself to Winter; whilst Sir John, left alone, rang the bell, and ordered luncheon; and then, searching about for writing materials, began and finished a long letter to his wife.

By the time he had ended the impromptu lunch was announced, and Edwina, dressed for travelling, came down, and did ample justice to the vianda. Half an hour later they were on their way to the railway-station.

'Should you like to see York?' asked Sir John of his daughter, who was still depressed, though no longer hungry.

'We stopped there as we came down, papa.'

'Then you do not care about breaking our journey for the night?'

'No, papa.'

'You would prefer going straight through to London?'

'Yes, papa.'

'You do not think it will be too much for you?'

'O no, papa.'

Such conversation was not likely to beguile the way, and Sir John felt pleased when he found the train pretty full, and that they were not able to secure



the privilege of a compartment to themselves. It was the same all the way. If one passenger or set of passengers alighted, others at once stepped into their vacant places. He bought some books and papers, and shared them with his daughter, who looked first at a paper, and then at a magazine, and then dipped into a book, till she grew tired and went to sleep. Sir John also indulged in a nap; and thus, with a cup of tea at Peterborough, and a few remarks interchanged with their fellow-travellers, they got through the time, and when it was very late arrived in London, hired a cab, and drove to Palace Gardens.

The master of that household had not been expected to return

until the following day, and Simonds manifested some surprise at sight of him.

'Miss Moffat has not gone upstairs, Sir John,' he said; 'she is in the library.'

But already Rachel was in the hall.

'Why, papa,' she cried, 'have you come back so soon, and Wina? I never expected to see you. Aren't you well, dear?'

'Yes, quite well; but so tired.'

'Then will you go straight to bed at once?' asked Rachel, with a little trouble in her face, for she thought there must be something wrong.

'Yes, that will be best,' said Sir John, answering for the girl.

### THREE R'S AND AN S.

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Now that the art of swimming is at all events theoretically admitted to be a necessary part of education, it is worth while to consider how far we have advanced in teaching and acquiring it. For some time past two or three of the London swimming-clubs have announced that their most proficient members are ready to give lessons at certain baths on stated occasions, and every summer we hear of matches, 'tournaments,' and 'contests,' in the practice of natation; but after all these efforts it may be feared that in many London neighbourhoods the aspirants for instruction could only become proficient on the principle set forth in Dr. Benjamin Franklin's early treatise on the subject, whereby the reader is gravely admonished 'on no account to go near the water until he can swim.'

Our local governments are so far from recognising the ordinary claims of civilisation by providing adequate baths in each metropolitan district; and London, which has sacrificed its numerous springs and pools to its system of drainage, is so destitute of natural bathing-places that we are still for the most part ignorant even of the science of 'taking a header,' while numbers of the dwellers in this great city have scarcely ever risen to the luxury of a complete daily ablution. That we remain in a condition too degraded to regard the delightful art of natation with proper complacency may be proved by the kind of barbarous curiosity and wonder with which

crowds of the same kind of people who frequent the Agricultural Hall walking-matches have recently assembled to stare and cheer at the evolutions of a young lady who contrived to survive sixty hours in a whale-tank illuminated by an electric light and subject to an oppressively close atmosphere. We are not prepared to quarrel even with this distorted fashion of developing popular emulation, however, for it may have the effect of stimulating a few young persons to acquire the power of sustaining themselves in the water for half an hour; and even this will be something remarkable in a maritime nation, where not above one in six of the seafaring population knows how to keep aloft if he should happen to fall overboard. It is scarcely to be wondered at that in a capital where the householder has to pay an extra rate if he should indulge the reprehensible desire of having a bath at home, and where, on a broad river running through the very centre of the city, there is only one swimming-bath, the price of admission to which is necessarily prohibitive to the common people, we are yet a long way from adding the S to the three R's in any ordinary course of education. The gymnasium, and even the cricket-field, may be recognised as accessories to the usual curriculum. The drill-sergeant has indeed become a regular officer even at Board schools, and the exercise which forms a part of the daily training has already effected a marked improvement in

the physique of the children ; but no nation with a well-ordered practical faculty would lay so much stress on cricket, drill, the horizontal bar, and the giant stride, and yet ignore the claims of the swimming-bath, which combines all the elements of health, recreation, fine exercise, cleanliness, and the sense of useful achievement.

There are admirable exceptions to the general neglect, however, and although the movement is slow and undemonstrative, the signs of a public protest in favour of making the swimming-class an indispensable adjunct to the teaching in all large schools are not to be mistaken. A few days ago some of the visitors to one of the largest benevolent institutions in London—the Orphan Working Schools at Maitland Park, Havestock-hill—were surprised to learn that the 276 boys and 147 girls between eleven and fourteen years of age who are inmates of the large and handsome building are regularly taught to swim, that a large proportion of them can swim well, that above fifty of the boys can swim for more than a mile, while some have gone above two miles, and a small minority has accomplished *four miles*.

It is worth noting that these children commence with no particular physical advantages, since they are taken from a class of society which is certainly not remarkable for personal strength or muscular development. They are mostly children of the lower middle class, which includes small tradespeople, clerks, foremen, shopmen, and journeymen ; but the boys and girls themselves are taken to the institution while they are young, and the mental and physical conditions of their lives at school are evidently such as to give them a thoroughly healthy

tone, to which the swimming-bath, a comparatively recent acquisition, has vastly contributed.

It would not be easy to find a company of boys of the same age who would 'strip' as well as the lads who are just ready to step on to the spring-board for the diving competition on this the great day of the school-year—the day when prizes are to be given for athletic sports, both to the 'old scholars,' who have left the institution, and come back as members of an athletic club, and to these young swimmers, who are already so famous in London school competitions, that they can scarcely find a team willing to enter a match with them.

The bath is not a large one—a good swimmer could go from end to end in less than a dozen strokes—but it is sufficient for the purposes of complete instruction and recreation, is light and well ventilated, and the water is so clear that the black and white squares which form the pattern of the tiled bottom are plainly visible ; and the rings, about the size of curtain-rings, of which the successful divers and swimmers under water will gather an armful, are lying there with an appearance of sinuous motion caused by the ripple of the surface.

The seniors, or boys over thirteen years of age, lead off in a competition for prizes for 'the best action,' including the varieties of fancy swimming—'hand over,' floating, paddling, 'tub,' arms only, legs only, and all the rest of it—and this is followed by an eighty-yards race, and diving, and swimming under water, the victor in the latter contest coming up with his right arm braceleted from wrist to elbow with above a dozen rings which he has brought from the bottom of the bath, where he has been swimming like a cautious

frog in a strange aquarium. The most remarkable part of the whole performance is the consummate ease with which the lads take the water, diving without splash or flurry from the spring-board, and slipping through a floating ring little larger than an ordinary life-buoy. Even the youngsters—little fellows only as high as one's elbow—have an accustomed air, which shows that they have already mastered the primary difficulty of becoming accomplished swimmers; while the boy who proudly takes the prize medal as the best swimmer in the school—a little fellow of about fourteen, small and slender, but admirably set up, and with a capital development of arm and shoulder—evidently thinks nothing of these small feats of the nautical art; for he is the principal four-mile boy, who has distinguished himself at one or two of the great school-matches at the Charing Cross Baths, and stands with the cool, conscious air of a veteran as he receives fresh honours. But one of the most interesting portions of the competition has yet to be exhibited, and it comes in rather a startling manner. With a wild and piercing cry a boy falls suddenly into the water at the extreme end of the bath, and, apparently unable to swim a stroke, struggles for a moment to the surface, calling for help, only to sink again, his hands beating the surface, his head far below. In a few seconds there is a shout from the space around the spring-board, and a lad who is distinguished as one of the best swimmers in the school, is already striking out with a long sweeping action towards his unlucky comrade. 'Don't be frightened, I've got you!' he calls out cheerily, and in another minute he has taken the struggler by the head,

at the same moment turning himself on his back and drawing the body of the rescued boy forward, so that the head is supported by his hands just below his chest. Then propelling himself backward with his legs only, he slowly but surely reaches the landing-stage, slips from beneath his burden, which he contrives to support till it is lifted from the water by those on the bank, and at once scrambles up the landing-steps, to assist in the work of resuscitation, which is effected by clearing the mouth, alternately raising the arms and pressing them downwards against the sides of the chest, rubbing the feet and legs and the left side over the heart, and gently moving the body from side to side on a blanket stretched upon a sloping board. The whole business is gone through in such a dramatic manner that, but for the relief of a laugh at the grim humour of the thing, one would scarcely be prepared for another sudden cry from a bather overtaken with cramp, and the prompt rescue effected by a second crack swimmer. There are six various kinds of rescues; and the whole performance is so excellent an illustration of the value of the accomplishment which has been taught so well, that one is ready to regard it as the most admirable of the whole series of trials. But yet there is one other—though it is only an incidental element of the competition—which is inexpressibly interesting, and that is the hearty applause and sincere appreciation of the boys themselves for the successful competitors. There is something so delightful in the evident enthusiasm in which small personal jealousy is forgotten or has no existence, and in the vigour with which they cheer on the favourites and greet the final victor, that one is quite

prepared to find this glorious principle of unselfish recognition of merit pervading the school examinations as well as the school competitions. It discovers a certain healthy simplicity as a distinguishing characteristic of the classes, and marks a just proportion of work and play. Heartiness in the play itself is manifested by masters and teachers as well as by scholars. In the spacious playground, the troops of boys who are not competing in, or assisting at, the swimming-matches, are at the giant-stride, or the bars, or practising bowling; and now that the match is over, competitions in walking, running, the long and high jumps, and throwing the cricket-ball are to be held by some of the former scholars, members of the Orphan Working School Athletic Club, and their performances are fair evidence of what may be effected by the kind of training which every boy may receive. Nor is the same evidence absent from the regular classes during the actual school-time. The examination-day follows the day of sports, as work follows play in the regular order of succession. The 420 children must take their dinner in the schoolrooms to-day. At each end of the great dining-hall, with its ceiling painted with a group of angels, are wide tiers of seats facing each other. One tier is already filled; the senior and junior boys occupying the two ends, and the girls the middle; while a large company of visitors—about two-thirds of whom are ladies—are coming through the chapel, and so entering by the upper passage near the organ. This organ, like the beautiful painting of the ceiling, was a gift, and is so placed as to sound both in the chapel and the great hall, serving alike for Sunday worship and for the

daily expression of joy and praise. Part-singing is one of the great recreations here; and to-day boys or girls, or both together, will join in some of those sweet part-songs in which their fresh, clear, cultivated voices have so admirable an effect. Between the short examinations in each subject there will come song, duet, or anthem, the proceedings commencing with Schubert's 'Gloria.'

On a platform between the two tiers of seats are the chairman of the occasion, that stanch friend of the charity, Mr. Charles Tyler, the examiners, and some of the vice-presidents and members of committee; and in the assembly of bright young faces, which look with modest confidence to the audience and to those who stand to them in the relation of the parents they have lost, there is no fear of failure.

Nor need there be. For in the subjects upon which they are examined they show not only that kind of proficiency which comes by rote, but the intelligent and reasonable interest that shows the distance between education and mere instruction. An acquaintance with Holy Scripture is a feature of the school which has always been maintained, and there are not wanting here signs that the knowledge is not intellectual or mental only, but has the power of a living influence. English history and geography are well studied, the latter being taught on a system which lifts the children above the dreary old dry bones of latitude, longitude, square miles, and population to the more interesting relations of various places to each other by their products, trade, and peculiar situation. The boys, too, have made fair progress in elementary botany, one of the most delightful branches of knowledge with which to em-

phasise a country ramble; and the girls show by their answers that they have been practically taught some of the plain laws of hygiene, and have learnt so much of 'physiology' as to know what are the processes of digestion, the value of properly-cooked food, and the necessity for fresh air, pure water, and cleanliness. The answers to the questions are remarkable for their bright ready intelligence, and as the examiners have come without previous communication, this is at least encouraging. The rapid fire of spelling, especially in the hard four-syllable words, is enough to make one stagger, especially that of the girls, who seem quicker and even more accurate than the boys in this respect; while in the excellent practice afforded by simple questions in mental arithmetic they are equally alert. The senior boys of course study Euclid, algebra, and the lower mathematics. Penmanship, mapping, freehand and other drawing are distinguishing parts of the education given at the school.

One cannot but see in the faces of some of the elderly ladies present an expression of mild surprise, mingled perhaps with a gentle regret (not envy) that they themselves had fewer advantages at the 'select academy' to which they were sent in their youth than are given to these orphan girls, to whose training such faithful care is being devoted. Some of the gentlemen, who listen with a comical pursing of their half-smiling lips to the sharp responses of the little lads, think, perhaps, that they themselves would cut an insignificant figure if they were 'dodged in thirteen times,' or had, with only five seconds' hesitation, to declare the value of fifteen articles at five shillings and ninepence three-farthings apiece.

But when we come to the distribution of prizes we learn still more of the domestic economy of this great family. It is all very well for eighteen boys to obtain prizes and first-class certificates for mathematics in the Science and Art Department, it is excellent for the most competent of the girls and one or two of the pupil-teachers (who, like the junior masters in the boys' school, have mostly been trained in the school itself) to take extra rewards for proficiency; but let it be remembered that a certain number of the girls are daily drafted off for housework, and that the house-girl's rewards are very valuable reminders of the useful character of the school-training; while the exhibition of needlework now in one of the rooms is in admirable accordance with a truly 'working' education. While on the subject of clothing and needlework, it is happily suggestive of the character of the school that the boys are neatly dressed in well-made dark tweed and cloth clothes, and that the girls are very prettily attired in dresses of a pleasant colour and straw hats, and not in the kind of repulsive uniforms which once distinguished all such institutions. Furthermore, the matron is particular to change the colour and to introduce some little regard to the fashions of children's dresses each year. There is much virtue in maintaining the feeling of self-respect in children, by not condemning them to be oddities and conspicuously unlike other people. The effect of this consideration has probably much to do with the modest, but yet free, happy, and unconstrained, demeanour of these orphans. They can all look into the face of the visitor and answer a question gently, pleasantly, and with a con-



fiding child-like familiarity that is the very opposite of the sullen formality which is only rudeness in disguise. And more than this: the boys playing in the large open space, or the girls chatting together in the corridors, do not lower their tones, or move away, or look confused, or even self-conscious, at the unexpected appearance either of visitor, teacher, master, matron, or committee. This is their home, from which they are sent out to situations, and to which they make periodical visits for seven years after they leave it. Indeed, many of the boys become subscribers to, and some of them grow to be governors of, an institution their obligations to which they are proud to acknowledge, even though it is 'supported by voluntary contributions.' As to the girls, those who leave school are still under the watchful care of the ladies' committee, and each lady has a girl or two to whom she is the particular friend for reference, counsel, guidance, and help. It is a delightful feature of this school that the girls go back to the school once a year to take tea with these friends, and often meet them at their houses beside. In fact, this personal domestic association of the supporters of the institution with the children is one of its best features, and it often takes the very pleasant form of treats and tea-drinkings at the houses of members of the committee, or of visits to the Zoological Gardens and other places by means of a number of admissions paid for by a friend. Among the donations in kind we find all sorts of seasonable and toothsome presents. A new bundle of books for the school library, or a score of tops or a cricket set, or a dozen skipping-ropes or toy-games, dolls, toy-ships, and ob-

jects for the museum will alternate with packets of sweets, boxes of oranges, a basket or so of bloaters, packets of articles for tea for six girls, baskets of fruit, invitations to alternate select parties 'to tea and spend the evening,' or even such a trifle as a sucking-pig; while one lady and gentleman, with true loving kindness, made guests for a day of all the children who were obliged to remain at the school during a midsummer holiday.

But we are still in the great hall, and one of the girls, in a distinct pleasant voice, is reading her report of the seamstress department of last year. In the girls' school there were mended 17,551 pairs of stockings and 18,860 other articles, beside 2876 articles made, including dresses, pinafores, and so on; while in the matron's workroom there were 7898 articles made and 23,126 articles mended. A pretty good amount of useful work that, beside lessons in washing, cooking, and light house-work. So come up, girls, for your prizes for diligence in needlework, as well as for proficiency in learning, and come up also for a reward for 'neatness of person, property, duties, &c., during the year.' Come up also, young lady who has been specially noticed for good manners and politeness. Next come thirty-three girls who are rewarded for specially good conduct: yes, and come forward also, you to whom the suffrages of your companions in the senior division have awarded the prize for Christian patience, goodwill, and forbearance. There is a similar prize to this among the boys as well as the usual rewards for progress in various studies. One fact, however, strikes the visitor as the girls come forward to receive their awards, and it is that some of

them are so well 'set up,' have an appearance of firmness of limb and clearness of skin, which is not universal. On inquiry it will be found that these are the swimmers of the girls' school, and that most of them have taken prizes for diving, swimming distances, or elegance of style, the rewards being appointed by a ladies' committee and the recommendation of three of the teachers, each of whom has her special novice to be trained to the art.

One word more. Among the bright little maids who come smiling to take their prizes of books, workbaskets, desks, money, or other things, is one large-eyed swarthy pretty child—orphan of an Hindoo ryot—and surely that young face, full of kindly regard and keen intelligence, should speak volumes for such an institution as this, where every year one orphan from India is supported by the proceeds of the sale of needlework executed by those who are already inmates of the great airy happy home at Maitland Park.

If those fourteen old gentlemen who, above a hundred years ago, met in Ironmonger-lane and completed a scheme for maintaining twenty boys and twenty girls in a school at 'Hogsden' could only see what the institution has grown to (and who shall say that they do *not* ?), they would (or must) be either surprised or delighted (perhaps both) at the differences that have come to the training of the young since that old severe, repressive, repellent time, when the children had only the smallest and most restricted recreations, and also the most restricted teaching: when they were employed

in dreary durance making garden-nets, list carpets, and list shoes; and when, having been for years droning out their reading-lessons and learning to scrawl moral maxims from copy-slips, they were only allowed to be taught arithmetic as *far as addition* by special recommendation of the committee, who had an extraordinary meeting to discuss the question. And yet the institution survived, and has lived not only to refute the old jealous, hardening, repulsive theories, but to show that such a school may be so organised as to be an example not only of the wider, freer, and more loving charity that should belong to the higher life, but of a true practical economy which will bear all the inquiries of the 'common-sense' section of society. For not the least remarkable feature of the Orphan Working School is, that its accounts are so kept (and published with its reports) that the average cost of every child, including its share of every item, such as rent, salaries, and even advertising, may be seen for each of the last twelve years.

When it is added that the entire cost of everything, when accurately divided according to the number of children supported and educated, represents an average of less than twenty-seven pounds per head, during the last year of exceptionally high prices, there is reason to believe that this robust charity is, at all events, moving with the times in other respects beside that of adding an S to the three R's that are sometimes supposed to represent the whole area of popular education.

T. A.

## BONNY GOLD.

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WHEN I was quite a little boy I dearly prized a 'brown,'  
Felt wealthy with a 'tizzy,' and went mad o'er half-a-crown ;  
There was music in their jingle to please my boyish heart,  
For well I knew that every 'brown' would buy an apple tart.  
But now for childish tastes like these I've grown too stiff and old,  
And little care for any sound save that of bonny gold.

Talk not to me of music ; it has charms, I know them well ;  
For I've heard the deep-voiced organ through majestic arches swell ;  
And in sylvan still recesses I have heard the summer's hum  
Like the murmur of a fountain through the leafy forest come.  
O'er my sickened wearied senses all this sweetness softly rolled ;  
But I longed for other music—'twas the chink of bonny gold.

I've heard the trumpet's martial note, that called upon the brave  
To wreath their brows with glory's crown or seek a soldier's grave ;  
Alone I've heard on Alpine heights the echoing thunder roar,  
Alone I've heard the angry waves boom heartless on the shore ;  
Yet what were these but thrilling sounds whose music little told,  
Compared to volumes spoken by the chink of bonny gold ?

If I should hear an organ grind a waltz before my door,  
It makes me dream I sail again along the polished floor ;  
But as I coax my pipe and watch the curling smoke arise,  
My smiling fancy half recalls a laughing pair of eyes—  
Of heartless eyes that years ago declared my own too bold,  
Because I could not dazzle them with bright and bonny gold.

There's music in my dear one's voice, I love her words to hear,  
For softly and caressingly they fall upon my ear ;  
I love the patter of her feet, the tremor of her sighs,  
The rustle of her silken dress, her greetings and good-byes ;  
But yet I love my money more, nor deem my bosom cold,  
For how shall we be wed without the help of bonny gold ?

\* \* \* \* \*

'Tis said that gold is evil's root, and preachers all declare  
That wealth is a delusion, all a vanity, a snare.  
'Sweet, sweet is humble poverty,' these gentlemen will say,  
'The virtues of humility will never pass away ;'  
Nor must pale Poverty to them her piteous tale unfold,  
For parsons hate the jingling sound of their departing gold.

'Tis true that youth and health and love can ne'er by gold be bought ;  
Yet want of these has oftentimes by want of gold been wrought.  
The withered cheek, the wasted form, the wrinkled brow of care,  
The broken heart, the rayless eye, the silver-threaded hair,  
All tell a tale, and sadly prove life's blessings must be sold  
Ere some may hear the merry chink of bright and bonny gold.

\* \* \* \* \*

'Can this be life?' I murmured, 'this the object of man's soul?  
The stormy sea beneath him, and gold his only goal?  
Can this be life?' I murmured, as I gazed upon the west,  
And saw it in the glory of its evening beauty dressed.  
'Ah, no; beyond life's ocean the weary may behold  
A fabled land whose portal gleams more bright than bonny gold.'

CECIL MAXWELL-LYTE.

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## HOW SNOOKS GOT OUT OF IT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'PHYLLIS,' ETC.

'If you will take my advice,' said Mr. Wilding, making a last noble but futile effort to balance the ivory paper-knife on the tip of his first finger, 'you won't go to the Brownrigs' ball.'

'And why not?' asked his companion irritably.

'Well, I really wouldn't, you know,' said Mr. Wilding, giving up his struggle with the impossible, and laying the refractory paper-knife upon the table,—'for a variety of reasons. Girls play the very mischief with you, and you know what trouble it gave me to get you out of your last scrape. There are four Brownrig girls, aren't there? And they are all pretty?'

'I don't see what that's got to do with it,' said Snooks sulkily. 'There's safety in a multitude. I can't marry 'em all, can I?'

'Happily, no! Though, if the laws of your land did not forbid it, I am inclined to think you might try to accomplish even that. Still, be advised, Snooks, and be conspicuous by your absence at the Brownrigs' "small and early." Papa Brownrig when incensed is not nice, and you know you are decidedly *épris* with Miss Katie.'

'No, I am not,' said Snooks, with decision, 'not a bit of it. Though I allow she is a handsome girl, and has lovely eyes. Hasn't she, now?'

'I don't know. As a rule I never look into a woman's eyes. I consider it a rudeness as well as a *bêtise*,' said Wilding earnestly, telling his lie without a blush. 'Never mind her eyes. If,' warningly, 'you must go to this ball, at

least try to forget that she has any eyes at all. If you don't, you will propose to her, to a moral.'

'One would think I was a raw schoolboy,' said young Snooks wrathfully. 'Do you think I can't look at a woman without committing myself? Do I look like a fool?'

Whatever Mr. Wilding thought at that moment, he kept it to himself. Before he spoke next, he and his conscience had agreed to dissemble.

'My dear fellow, do not let us even hint at such a thing,' he said amiably. 'I only meant you were slightly—very slightly—susceptible, and that Miss Katie has a certain amount of pleasing power, and that—I positively *would* give up this ball if I—'

'Are you going?' broke in Snooks impatiently.

'Well, yes, I daresay I shall look in about twelve.'

'Then I shall look in with you,' said Snooks defiantly.

'Fact is, the fellow wants to spoon her himself, and don't see the force of being cut out,' said he to himself complacently, as he ran down the steps of Wilding's stairs.

Beyond all question the Brownrigs' ball was a decided success. The rooms were filled to overflowing, the staircases were choked, the heat was intolerable. Sir Thomas and Lady Higgins had actually put in an appearance after all, and the supper, if uneatable, was, I assure you, very expensive. No pains or money had been spared; everything was what

the mistress of the house called 'rug regal;' and all the Miss Brownrigs looked as charming as any one could desire.

There were four of them. There was Katie, the second daughter—Snooks's friend, and the possessor of the lovely eyes. And they were lovely: large, 'and dark, and true, and tender,' like the North, according to the Laureate; 'black as sloes,' said her fond if slightly oppressive mother, and of the languid melting order.

Then there was Hetty, the eldest girl, who, if her eyes were not dark as midnight, had at least the dearest little nose in the world. A pure Greek feature, perfect in every respect, ignorant of colds in the head, that made one long to tell her (only she would have blushed, they were all nicely brought up) about Dudu, and her Phidian appendage.

Then came Georgie—'George the third,' as she was playfully termed in the bosom of her family—who, if she had neither nose nor eyes like her sisters, had certainly a prettier mouth than either. A sweet little kissable rosebud of a mouth, that pouted and laughed alternately, and did considerable execution.

And finally there was Lily. A tall pale girl, with blue eyes, a finely cut chin, and a good deal of determination all round.

Katie's eyes were larger, darker, and (when she looked at Snooks and thought of his thousands) more melting than ever that night. Her dress, if slightly *bizarre*, was intensely becoming. Snooks, for the first half hour, kept himself bravely aloof from her fascinations, declined to notice her reproachful glances and languishing *cellades*, and for reward was wretched. Finally, being driven into a corner during a fatal set of Lancers, he met her eyes, saw, and was conquered.

She would dance the next with him? Yes (coldly). And the next? Yes (more gently). And the ninth—he can see she is disengaged for it? Yes (this time quite warmly).

An hour later the deed was done. Some capital champagne, a dark avenue (I believe there were some Chinese lanterns there originally, but a kind wind had blown them out), and a soft little hand slipped into his, did the work; and Miss Katie had promised bashfully, but with unmistakable willingness, to be the future Mrs. Snooks. Whether it was Snooks or the property pertaining to Snooks she most affected, deponent sayeth not.

When, however, her betrothed found what he had done, and remembered his former words, and all the awfulness of parental wrath, his heart failed him. He went, as he usually did when in sorry case, in search of Wilding; and having discovered him, took him into a side-room, and shutting the door confronted him with a rather pale face.

'So the eyes were too many for you,' said Mr. Wilding calmly, after a deliberate examination of the disturbed face before him. 'I told you how it would be.'

'That's the sort of thing any fellow might say,' returned Snooks pathetically. 'I didn't think *you* would have been so aggravating. And just when you see I'm down on my luck too. Yes; I've been and gone and done it.'

'*"Mother will be pleased,"*' quoted his friend and law adviser, with a shrug. 'So, by the bye, will be your father. They both regard nothing so highly as birth. I suppose Miss Brownrig can lay claim to some decent breeding?'

'The old chap is a cornchandler, you know that; at least, he used to be,' said Snooks, with a heavy groan.



'O, indeed! And a very charming business too, I make no doubt. Leads up to quite a train of ideas. Corn, wheat, staff of life, quaint old mill, and rustic bridge in the distance; miller sitting on it. I wonder,' dreamily, 'if Brownrig ever wore a white hat? And if so—why? Don't all speak at once. Well, well, she is a very pretty girl. Such eyes, you know! I really congratulate you, my dear fellow.'

'Wilding,' desperately, 'can't you do something? I—I don't know how it happened. It was the champagne, I suppose, and of course you know she *is* pretty; but I don't want to marry any one, and I know the governor wouldn't hear of it.'

'He will have to hear of it now, won't he?' asked Wilding unfeelingly.

'He would go out of his mind if such a thing was even hinted to him,' declared Snooks wildly. 'Try to help me out of it, Wilding, can't you?'

'I don't see what there is to do, except marry her. I only hope Lady Snooks and Miss Cornchandler will get on. And you should think of her beauty, you know; doubtless it will console you when Sir Peter cuts you off with the customary shilling.'

'I suppose I had better cut my throat and put an end to it,' said Snooks dismally, and then—overcome, no doubt, by the melancholy of this suggestion—he breaks down and gives way to tears.

'I say, don't do that, you know,' exclaimed Wilding indignantly. 'Weeping all over the place won't improve matters, and will only make you look a worse fool than Nature intended, when you go out of the room. If you *have* put your foot in it, at least try to bear misfortune like a man. Look here,' angrily, 'if you are going to keep

up this hideous boo-hooing I'll leave the room, and you too, to your fate. It's downright indecent. They will hear you in the next house if you don't moderate your grief.'

As the nearest house was a quarter of a mile off, this was severe.

'I shouldn't care if they heard me in the next town,' said Mr. Snooks, who was quite too far gone for shame.

'There is just one chance for you, and only one,' said Wilding slowly. 'I have an idea, and you must either follow it, or—go to the altar.'

'I'll follow anything,' eagerly.

'What is it?'

'You have proposed to Miss Katie,' solemnly. 'Now go, and propose to the other three!'

As Wilding gave vent to his idea he turned abruptly on his heel and left the room.

'I'll do it,' said Snooks valiantly, drying his eyes and giving his breast a tragic tap, 'whatever comes of it.'

Going into the hall, he saw Hetty standing near an entrance; a little way beyond her was Katie, conversing with a tall and lanky youth. Not daring to glance in the direction of the latter, who plainly expected him to come straight to her on the wings of love, he turned and asked Hetty to dance.

They danced, and then (it was a custom with the ball-goers in that mild suburban neighbourhood) he drew her out under the gleaming stars and up the dark avenue that a few minutes since was the scene of her sister's happiness.

There he proposed in due form, and was again accepted. Hetty's conduct, indeed, was perhaps a degree more pronounced than Katie's, because she laid her head upon his shoulder, and he felt he

was by all the laws of sentiment bound to kiss her. Her nose looked lovely in the pale moonlight; so I daresay he did not find the fulfilling of this law difficult.

After that he had some more, a good deal more, champagne; and then he proposed to Miss Georgie, who also consented to be his. There now remained but one other step to be taken. He crossed the room, and asked the youngest Miss Brownrig to dance. He was getting rather mixed by this time, and was on the very point of asking her to marry him instead, so customary had the question grown to him now. Miss Lily, however, declined to dance, on the plea that she was tired, and could exert herself no more that night. With questionable taste he pressed the matter, and begged her to give him one, just one. At this she told him frankly she did not admire his style of dancing, which of course ended the conversation. So he asked her to come for a stroll instead; and, having arrived at the momentous spot, delivered himself of the ornate speech that had already done duty three times that night. I forget what it was, but I know it wound up with the declaration that he adored her and wanted to marry her.

'It's extremely good of you, I'm sure,' said the youngest Miss Brownrig calmly. 'But, uncivil as I fear it must sound, I don't want to marry you.'

'Don't you, by Jove!' said Snooks hastily. 'Well, that's awfully ki— No, no!' pulling himself up with a start; 'I don't mean that, you know; I mean it's awfully horrid, you know. In fact, warning to his work through sheer gratitude, 'you have made me miserable for ever; you've broken my heart.'

'Dear me, how shocking!' said Miss Lily frivolously. 'Let us

hope Time will mend it. I'm not very sure you did not speak the truth at first. I really believe it is kind, my refusing you. And now, Mr. Snooks, if I were you I should go in and say good-night to mamma, because you have been having a good deal of papa's champagne, and it is trying to the constitution.'

Snooks took the hint, bade farewell to Mrs. Brownrig, who, to his heated imagination, appeared to regard him already with a moist and motherly eye, and, taking Wilding's arm, drew him out of the house.

'Well?' said the latter interrogatively.

'I don't know whether it is well or ill,' returned he gloomily. 'But I followed your advice, and proposed to 'em all.'

'And they accepted you?'

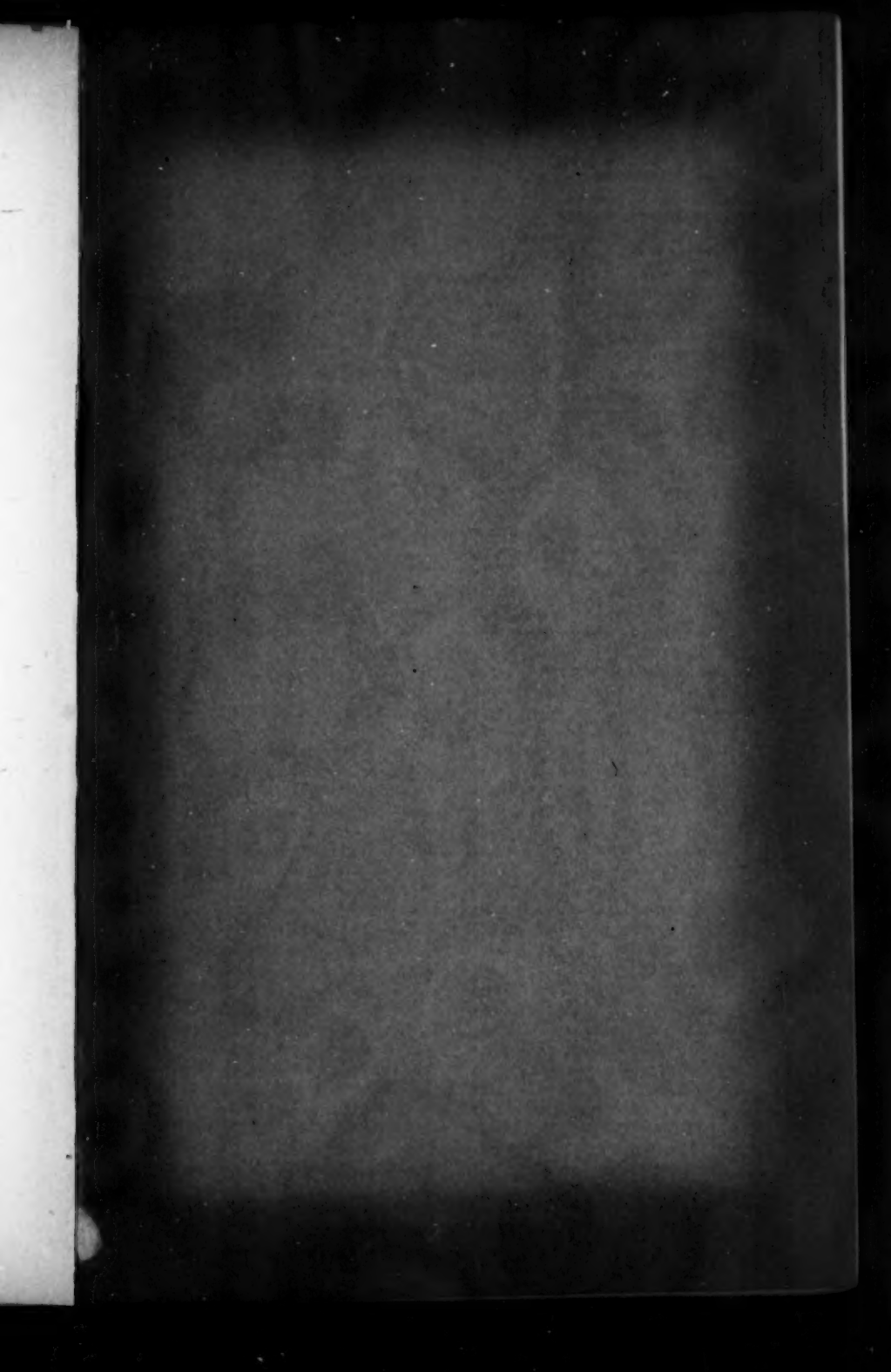
'The most of 'em. But Lily, the youngest, she—'

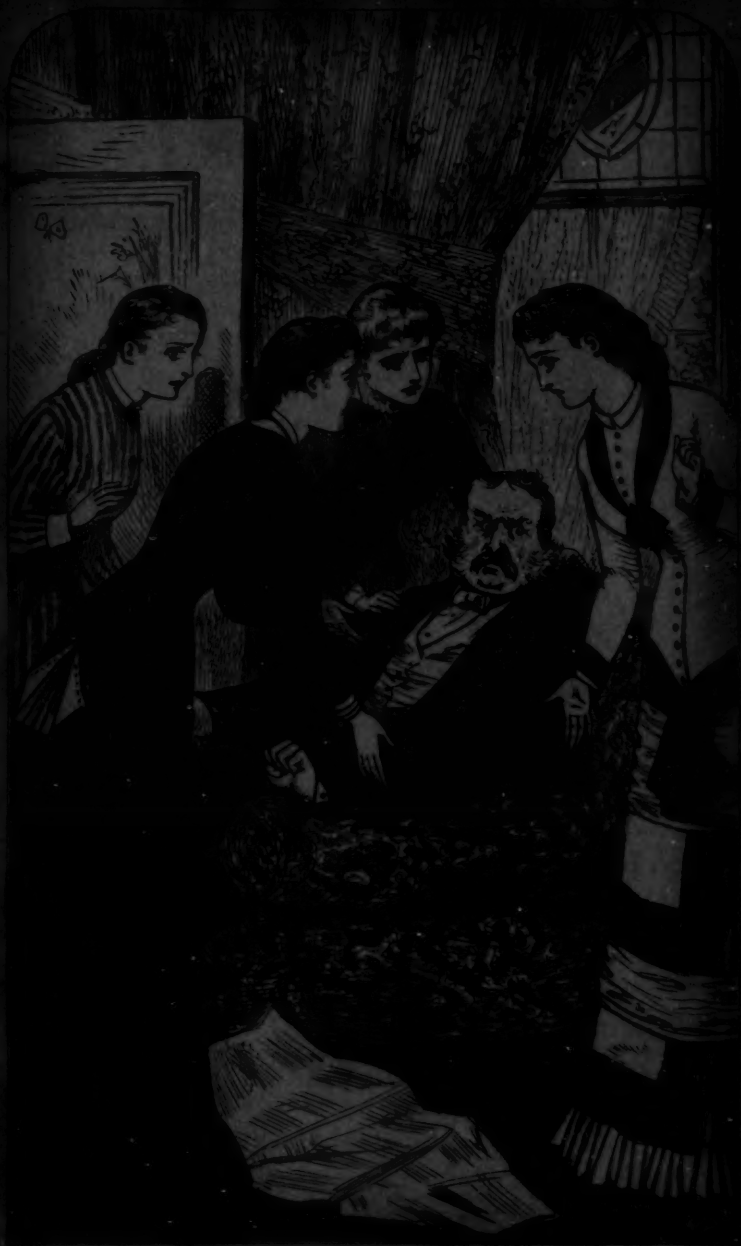
'I always said she was a sensible girl,' put in Mr. Wilding *sotto voce*.

'Did you?' with much surprise. 'Well, she refused me; sort of said she wouldn't have me at any price. So you see you were wrong!'

'I always knew she was one of the most intelligent girls I ever met,' Mr. Wilding repeated, in a tone so difficult that his companion for once had sufficient sense to refrain from demanding an explanation.

The next morning, as Katie Brownrig turned the angle of the hall that led to her father's sanctum (whither a sense of filial duty beckoned her) she almost ran into the arms of her three sisters, all converging towards the same spot from different directions. Simultaneously they entered Mr. Brownrig's study. (He called it a library; but that word is too often





THE SCENE IN MR. BROWN'S ROOM

profaned for me to profane it, so I shall draw the line at study.) But to return. Miss Lily, being the youngest, was of course the first to raise her voice.

'I had a proposal last night, papa, and I have come to tell you about it,' said she, in a tone replete with triumph.

It is so sweet to the mind of youth to outdo its elders. But 'on this occasion only' the elders refused to be outdone. They each and all betrayed a smile of inward satisfaction, and then they gave way to speech.

'No!' they said, in a breath. They did not mean to doubt or be impolite; they only meant surprise.

'The curate,' said Hetty, in a composed but plainly contemptuous whisper. It was a stage-whisper.

'Old Major Sterne,' said Miss Georgie promptly.

'Perhaps Henry Simms,' suggested Katie, with some sympathy. Then turning to her father she said, with a conscious blush, 'It is very strange, papa, but I too had a proposal last night.'

'And so had I!' exclaimed Georgie and Hetty in a breath.

'Eh?' said papa, pushing up his spectacles. He was fat and pudgy, with sandy hair and a flabby nose. He was a powerful man too, and one unpleasant to come to open quarrel with. Proposals in the Brownrig family were few and far between—in fact curiosities—and so much luck, as the girls described, falling into one day overpowered him.

'One at a time; my breath is not what it used to be,' he said, addressing Katie. (If he had said *breathth*, it would have been equally true, as his mother—if she was to be believed—always declared he was a lean baby.) 'May I ask the name of your lover?'

'Mr. Snooks,' said she, with

downcast eyes and a timid smile. She took up the corner of a cherry-coloured bow that adorned her gown, and fell to admiring it, through what she fondly thought was bashfulness.

'Impossible!' exclaimed Georgie angrily.

'What a disgraceful untruth!' cried Hetty rudely. 'Mr. Snooks proposed to me, to me, last night, and I accepted him.'

'What is it you say? O, I am going out of my mind; my senses are deserting me,' said Georgie, putting her hands to her head with a dramatic gesture. 'Or is it a dream that he asked me to marry him, and that I too said "yes"?''

'I seldom visit the clouds,' said Lily, with a short but bitter laugh. 'And I certainly know he made me a noble offer of his hand and heart; both which treasures I declined.'

'Where?' demanded the other three, as though with one mouth.

'In the laurel avenue!'

At this they all groaned aloud.

'Perfidious monster!' said Hetty from her heart.

'Am I to understand,' began Mr. Brownrig, with suppressed but evident fury, 'that this—this—unmitigated scoundrel asked you *all* to marry him last night?'

'If we speak the truth, *yes*,' replied the girls dismally.

'He was drunk,' said papa savagely.

'I can't believe it,' said Katie, who was dissolved in tears—in fact, 'like Niobe, *all* tears'—by this time. 'Nothing could be nicer than the way he did it. His language was perfect, and so thoroughly from the—*heart*.'

'He addressed me in a most honourable, upright, and Christian fashion,' said Hetty. 'I am sure he meant every word he said.'

She was thinking uneasily of

that kiss in the moonlight. *Could any one have seen her? Was old Major Sterne anywhere about at the moment?*

'I certainly considered his manner strange, not a bit like what one reads,' said Georgie honestly; 'but I thought of the title and the property, and I said yes directly.'

'I thought him the very greatest muff I ever spoke to,' broke in Miss Lily, with decision. 'I refused him without a moment's hesitation, and told him to go home. I'm sure it was well I did. I daresay if he had stayed here much longer, he would have proposed to mamma next, and afterwards to the upper housemaid. I agree with you, papa, the champagne was too much for him.'

'I—I think he is fond of me,' said Katie, in a low and trembling tone. Her fingers are not playing with the cherry-coloured bow now, but her eyelids have borrowed largely of its tint.

'Don't be a goose, Katie,' said the youngest Miss Brownrig, kindly but scornfully; 'you don't suppose any of us would marry him now after the way he has behaved. Do have some little pride.'

'Perhaps he is mad,' said Hetty vaguely. Just at this moment, as a salve to her wounded vanity, she would have been glad to believe him so.

'No, my dear,' declared Lily calmly; 'he has no brains worth turning.'

'He said something, papa, about calling to-day at four o'clock,' said Katie very faintly.

'Then I shall sit here till four,' returned Mr. Brownrig, in an awful tone. 'I shall sit here until *five*; and then I shall get up, and go out and find that young man, and give him such a horse-whipping as I warrant you he never got before in all his life.'

'Don't be too hard on him, papa,' entreated Katie weakly.

'I sha'n't, my dear, but my whip will,' said papa grimly.

So he waited until five; he waited till half-past five; and then he took up a certain heavy gold-knobbed whip that lay stretched on the table as though in readiness, and sallied forth in search of Snooks's rooms. And he found them, and Snooks too—in bed, suffering from a severe catarrh, caught, I presume, in the laurel avens.

And no man knows what he did to Snooks. But at least he gave him an increased desire for his bed, because for a fortnight afterwards he never stirred out of it.

When Mr. Wilding heard of all this, I regret to say he gave way to noisy mirth in the privacy of his chambers; and was actually caught by his washerwoman—who peeped through the keyhole—performing a wild dance in the middle of the floor.



## THE VIOLIN-PLAYER.

BY BERTHA THOMAS, AUTHOR OF 'PROUD MAISIE.'

### CHAPTER XXV.

MIRAMAR: A PAGE OF A  
MANAGER'S DIARY.

WHEN Cuscutus, some thirty years hence, publishes his 'Recollections,' from materials accumulating in a journal he keeps for the purpose, he will make a piquant chapter out of a certain excursion to Miramar, on the Lake of Como. He foresaw that, and was careful to jot down in his memory the little incidents of the day, the laughable misadventures that befell, the practical jokes, the *bons mots* spoken, and so forth, from the moment when his party left their hotel, up to the unexpected *dénouement* which deprived him of two members of his troupe at once.

Three weeks over—he wrote in his diary the night before—without a *fracas*. It is the calm before the squall. Come it must, as I knew when I found I had got two queen bees in my hive. They always fight till one is killed. Mdlle. Therval is not jealous or vindictive, I begin to think; but one is quite enough to make a quarrel, whatever people may say, when that one is a jealous woman.

Our *Suonatrice* carries all before her, including our own party, for no one grudges her her success. Stranger still, it doesn't seem to elate her—more's the pity. I consider a dose or two of self-conceit quite an essential stimulant in our profession. O these women! Always in extremes! Either

they make us blush for human nature, or—nothing will satisfy them but they must be too good for this world.

Regina sings more and more out of tune, but her dimples and dresses bring down the house sometimes. She regularly embraces Mdlle. Therval every night, to show us all that she isn't jealous. Her amiability surprises every one: I only know the cause. She scents a mystery, and has cast herself for the part of the heroine. Heaven forgive me! I am partly to blame for her delusion. Hints I dropped about great personages in disguise—princes turned wandering minstrels, in order the more easily to approach the object of their affections—put her on the track. I meant to mystify her only; but Regina went and appropriated the allusions, just as she appropriated the bouquet meant for Mdlle. Therval. She has a perfect kleptomania for attentions. She has become quite polite to Tristan; she no longer complains of having to sing duets with him, and is stone-blind to it that he is stone-deaf to the wiles of the siren. She has given the others to understand that she is the cause of his melancholy, and they laughingly condole with her on her conquest. The comedy of errors approaches its climax.

Our basso has not betrayed himself yet. He gets through with his singing, and holds his peace, for the most part, at other

times; but I suspect he has already had enough of Bohemian life, and the manners and customs of some of us are a sore trial to his fastidious nerves. When Mdle. Visconti conveys peas into her mouth with her knife, when the unblushing Erlanger cracks the most astonishing jokes for our edification over the dinner-table, his eyes seek out Mdle. Therval with a joint compassion and devotion that is really touching.

The sun shone bright for us that memorable morning. Every one was in good spirits, of course. We always must be in good spirits; it is forbidden us to think about the clouds of yesterday or to-morrow. Regret and anxiety are the heavy luggage of life, and artists must leave it behind, if they are to do their duty properly, which is to help other people to forget their cares. There were plenty of serious tourists on board the steamer from Como that morning, with guide-books, waterproofs, and solemn countenances and well-regulated minds. We noticed how bored they looked. They stared with astonishment at our party, who never seemed to want for something to talk and laugh about. Presently an Englishman came sauntering towards us, I suppose to pick up some crumbs of amusement. Erlanger was at his pleasantries as usual, now mimicking the captain of the boat, his walk, swagger, his peculiar habit of igniting a match on his trousers; now bantering the peasants, of which there were numbers on board, and speculating on the probable contents of their large baskets. One old woman volunteered to open hers for him, and out sprang a large bird with clipped wings—an owl, she said—which she used her utmost eloquence to persuade him to buy. The son of Albion soon had

enough of us, and rejoined his mamma and sisters under the awning.

The palazzo Miramar overlooks the lake, and stands but a few paces from a little landing-place. It is not shown to visitors, and no tourists came on shore at the pier but ourselves.

'About as like a barn as a palazzo,' observed Erlanger critically, as we strolled up to the entrance. 'Just a handsome stone balcony, a screen to hide the paste-board house behind.'

'But the situation is good,' Regina observed soothingly. Ah, if she were the owner of the place, or had a voice in the matter, she would turn it into a very paradise of pleasure; and she went on naively to describe to Tristan the improvements she would introduce into the external arrangements of house and garden.

An old housekeeper stood on guard in the doorway, evidently prepared for the incursion. She received us with some ceremony, offered us refreshment, and then escorted us leisurely over the first and second floors.

'Poor relation of the Baron's,' said Erlanger, aside, to Mdle. Therval. 'Puts her in charge here. Gives her a home and saves himself a servant. Charity and economy combined. Clever! Cus-cus, what are you laughing at?'

'She must be under orders from her master, or cousin, or whatever he is,' whispered our tenor, 'to treat us so civilly. Never in my life before have I been well received by a single woman in charge of an empty house.'

'Do you hear what he says? caught up Erlanger the incorrigible. 'Never in his life before has he been well received by a single woman in charge of an empty house!' And our *primo*

*amoroso*, who is always boasting of his conquests off the stage, was overwhelmed with malicious condolences.

I saw nothing worth noticing in the first two stories of the palazzo; but had we been passing through a museum of wonders we could not have examined each object, as it presented itself to our view, more gravely and carefully. It has unluckily got known among them that I keep a diary; and, on occasions of this sort, they swarm round me officiously, supplying me with facts, divers and interesting, for my journal. Not an item of the baronial furniture or lumber escaped minute scrutiny. There was Erlanger, putting on his eyeglasses to look at an old broken water-jug; our tenor delicately fingering a window-curtain of faded chintz he took for old tapestry. Only Tristan showed a decided want of interest in the details of Miramar's domestic arrangements. As to Mdle. Visconti, she ran about prying into nooks and corners with untiring curiosity and energy, ransacking drawers, peeping behind curtains, pulling open chiffoniers and cabinets, remarking on their contents, and admiring everything promiscuously.

'Look, look!' she cried suddenly, in a tone of delight, pointing to a shelf in the cupboard she had thrown open to inspection. 'The beautiful blue jar!'

'There's for you, Cuscut!' they shouted with one accord. 'Where are your tablets? Put it down. "Here we admired especially an ultramarine vase, of unique Indian ware."'

'What a shame! to leave it knocking about in an old cupboard!' said Regina.

'I shall write and tell Miramar his aunt doesn't look properly after his belongings,' said Erlanger

languidly. 'Take care what you're doing, Tristan. Don't meddle with the pottery. Who breaks, pays, you know. Miramar is a miser, I can tell that, from the look of his house.'

Our basso had laid hold of the 'vase' with no gingerly fingers, and, turning it round, displayed the label on the other side—'Tazenby, London, Pickles;' a discovery that provoked fresh mirth, and the laugh was against Mdle. Visconti.

By this time most of us—myself for one—had quite forgotten that we had come here expressly to see a magnificent collection of musical instruments, unique in Italy, and that constituted in fact the only point of distinction between this and a score of other country houses on the lake.

We were reminded when we got up to the third story, where the treasures were kept in a small room opening upon the balcony we had admired from below. Here we found something worth the attention we gave it. The first Baron Miramar, who didn't know one note from another, had a mania for collecting instruments of music, ancient and modern. His son, the amateur, regards this as the most valuable part of his inheritance. Mdle. Visconti's eyes wandered about from one glass case to another, seeking for something to covet.

'If you had your choice of all these,' she began characteristically at last, 'which would you select?'

It was an *embarras de richesses* indeed, and we all found some difficulty in making up our minds. Erlanger professed himself much fascinated by an Indian flute, made of an enemy's bone. 'There's harmony out of discord for you,' he remarked admiringly. For my part, I gave the preference to a double pipe; flute and tobacco-

pipe in one. Killing two birds with one stone has always had a special attraction for me. Regina was captivated by a mediæval lute, inlaid with ivory, exquisitely carved, and of a graceful shape. 'So becoming to the player,' she observed candidly. 'How much more picturesque than pianos and violins! Ah, I should have been an instrumentalist if I had lived in those days,' she sighed, with an arch glance at Tristan, who was watching her gravely. 'What a contrast, even to these!' she added, pointing to three Cremona violins in a separate glass case, and upon which Mdlle. Therval's beautiful wistful eyes were naturally fixed. No need to ask her where her choice would have lain. These were in fact the real gems of the collection. 'Does your master play?' asked Regina brusquely, turning to our escort.

'His Excellency is a collector,' she replied oracularly, as she unlocked the case that held the jewels.

'Collector? Dog in the manger, you mean,' rejoined Erlanger, with indignation. 'But the dog is not at home. Mdlle. Therval, suppose you take one and play for us. It would be a sin for you to pass by and not touch: they should belong to you, by rights, not to him, the idle fool.'

The opportunity was tempting, but Mdlle. Therval seemed to hesitate. 'What would his Excellency say?' I suggested gravely.

'He'll never know,' returned Erlanger. 'You or Tristan will give the good lady a trifle to hold her tongue.' Our basso seconded the entreaties, remarking that the owner, if ever it came to his ears, could only regret that he had not been present to assist at the experiment. '*Suona, suona,*' we all cried with one consent; but as the room was too small for good

acoustic effect, we stepped out on the balcony. The player stood up in the middle; we grouped around her, listening intently,—all but Regina, who was posing, as though the violin *romanza* were but the accompaniment, the soft music to her beauty and allurements, which at this very moment were understood to be breaking the heart of the bass of the sorrowful countenance. Herr Tristan, at the extreme end of the balcony, was looking across at her despondingly. She forgot he was short-sighted, Regina, and could not tell a beautiful woman from Emanuel Cuscut at a distance of yards.

Our *Suonatrice* played on, as artists play impromptu, seldom before a paying public—the bloom is off the peach before it gets to the market. I, Emanuel Cuscut, could be sentimental, when Beethoven is being played on a balcony by Mdlle. Therval on a Cremona violin. But this time my attention was diverted by Regina's byplay with Tristan. It was very coquettish, and so upset my gravity that presently I was compelled to retreat indoors to laugh. On the balcony of the room opposite I had noticed a little staircase leading up to the flat roof, where there was a promenade—Italian fashion—set with flower-pots. I pursued my explorations in this direction, to find myself over my companions' heads, looking down on the balcony. Mdlle. Therval had just ceased playing, and they were all applauding her. I joined in, to draw their attention to my present position; when a fresh diversion was created in the volatile minds of my party by the sight of a fine Angora cat. Regina made a dart at it; but it eluded her, and ran into the house. She gave chase; the others followed, and they went racing with a hue

and cry through the dismantled chambers of the palazzo. Mdlle. Therval lingered on the balcony. Music has a dangerous power of reminiscence. What she was thinking of, as she leaned over the balustrade, pretending to watch the boats on the lake, the women washing linen on the water's brink, I could not conjecture; but presently, turning round, she saw Tristan there behind her. The Angora chase had ended in an impromptu game of hide and seek; and he, leaving those madcaps, had seized the opportunity to return to the balcony, and, closing the glass doors, shut himself out there with her alone.

I fancy she would have avoided the *tête-à-tête* if she could; but how could she? He had a determined look, a look that Curtius might have worn when about to leap into the gulf. There seemed to me no indiscretion in assisting in the scene. I was beginning to be interested, and a little anxious as to the result.

Tristan watched her for a minute in silence as she stood there holding the Stradivarius. Then I distinctly heard him say, with emphasis,

'You are a happy woman.'

This, I take it, was only a roundabout way of telling her he was an unhappy man. Mdlle. Therval raised her wondering eyes; her fingers still, with a nervous unconscious movement, ran over the dumb strings of the violin.

'Why?' she asked simply.

'You are a great musician,' said the enthusiast; 'that should be enough for content.'

'Some might think,' she returned, with spirit, 'that to have what you have, and be what you are, ought to be enough also.'

'Is that a reproach,' he asked despondingly, 'for having laid aside my position and independ-

ence, that I might, for a little while, be near you?'

She shrank slightly at this confession; he resumed:

'O, why say it? I see it in your face. What earthly pleasure can a fastidious amateur find in replacing a third-rate professional, and convincing himself how immeasurably his inferior he is on the platform? You forget; it was a way to your presence—your daily companionship.'

She merely replied, in a tone of delicate but distinct reproach,

'When I promised to keep the secret of your name, you assured me it was a musical experience you had set your heart on making.'

'It was true, but not the whole truth. You have my confession now. To be with you, not merely to hear you play, but to see you smile, move, live—as your comrades might—that was what I longed for. I envied that idiot Cuscutus' (thank you, Monsieur Tristan), 'who hands you up to the platform; I envied that dancing-master Erlanger, when he accompanies you, or turns over the leaves. Women never love like that. It is the better for them.'

Her eyes flashed, not at him, but, as it were, at something in the distance. She turned to him now, saying firmly,

'At that time you made me a promise—never to repeat, never again to speak of this.'

'I remember,' he interposed. 'I have broken my part of the contract, and forfeit your promise to keep my secret. But the farce is over, and my adventure ends here. I do not intend even to return with you to Como. Cuscutus won't be surprised; nothing surprises him. So, as I am leaving, you will listen—for this one last time.'

I was growing seriously uneasy.

I have always known my friend 'Tristan' for an oddity, so his fantastic idea of joining us hardly surprised me. That there was a sentimental motive at the bottom of it I have since observed; but who would have suspected him of such a serious, obstinate design, as put me in danger of having all my plans upset? His meaning, then, was nothing less than to rob me of my violin-player by making her his Baroness. I stood aghast at the thought, which first dawned upon me now. He did not leave me in suspense another moment.

'I have learnt to understand this at least,' he said impressively, 'that I was wrong to dream of asking you to give up the full free exercise of your talent in your profession, to become my wife. Forgive me for not saying in Rome, months ago, what I say now. Remain what you are, the world's violin-player, yet let me hope. Instead of your taking my station upon you, I take yours. You and your art-interests shall be the sole object of my life. Your career may be varied and exciting, but has it not its trials too? Do you never need a companion who has the right to protect you, whose business it is to guard you from care and persecution? Does not every woman need such a one? Should not you, of all others?'

I was losing all patience as I listened to this outburst. I could have remonstrated and protested, but felt it was too late. The cursed fellow had outwitted me. It was evidently an old attachment too, and he was ready now to sacrifice anything she asked—let her name her own conditions. His proposal was that she should continue to play the violin; but once let *Mdlle. Therval* change her name and condition, and I

had little faith in her remaining with *Emanuel Cuscu*. *Tristan* himself cannot have hung upon her answer with more painful eagerness. She spoke so low as to be inaudible, but it was superfluous. Her look, accent, gesture, told me all; and in *Tristan's* countenance I had further proof, had I wanted it, in its fixed melancholy as he listened. I breathed again, and lit a cigarette. Poor *Tristan*! I must say he bore his fate very well, and did not seem so surprised as I was.

'Let me tell you something,' he resumed presently, with the astonishing fluency silent people show in an emergency, when the ice is once broken. 'You will never love a man of these Bohemians—these vagabond adventurers.' (Thanks again, my friend; you shall pay for this.) 'You may herd with them, eat with them, be classed with them, friends with them, and adored by them: it can go no further. They feel, and you feel, there is a barrier between you, they will never pass.'

To this she returned no answer.

'I think of that,' he said, 'and am no more jealous of these associates of yours; for I say to myself that, whatever I may be to you now, I could never have been more than a comrade, were I the poor singer I have so often wished myself. Was there truth in that?'

She evaded his question. Her voice trembled a little, then grew clearer, as she answered,

'I cherish my liberty. I should not make a good wife to you. I see now I am never to live but for music.'

'You are divine,' he exclaimed suddenly, 'and I most undeserving of you. I will live to become more worthy of what I knew all the while was only a mad dream, and which I now give up, entirely and for ever at your command.'



She took the hand he offered, saying,

'And if I ask you to keep your word and part from us at once—it is for a reason—I think—I fear all this is doing mischief.'

'My adventure ends here,' he said, raising her hand to his lips.

A low laugh from inside the room startled them, as it did myself. The laugh was Regina's. Mdle. Therval quitted the balcony instantly. The window had been closed during their dialogue, so Regina can merely have been an ocular witness of the scene. I alone was in a position to give a full and true account of what had passed, and I confide only in these pages.

But Regina had seen enough thoroughly to put her out of temper. She feigned *insouciance*; but I saw the storm blowing up at last that I had apprehended. I hastened to descend from my perch and rejoin them. Tristan, as I anticipated, got me aside for a private interview, which was soon concluded, to our mutual satisfaction. He is really a most superior man, both as to culture and generosity, one with whom it is a pleasure to have to deal, and Mdle. Therval's insensibility to his advances is totally inexplicable to me.

The return steamer was now approaching the pier. I had forgotten the hour, and caught sight of the funnel barely in time to summon my stray sheep together—urging all to fly, unless they wished to lose the boat. We made a rush for the landing, and in the flurry the secession of one among us was not noticed.

Only when we had got safely on board, a mere instant before the steamer started, it was perceived that the butt of the party was missing.

'Where's Tristan? What has become of him?'

'Jumped into the lake to take singing-lessons from the mermaids,' said Erlanger, peering over the sides of the steamer.

'Or stayed behind to make love to the civil housekeeper,' suggested the tenor. 'Great Heavens! I said so. Look, look! There he is, on the balcony!'

The steamer was passing before the windows. There above, sure enough, stood our ex-basso, leaning over the parapet, and making friendly signs.

'He is speaking to us. Hark! What does he say?'

The air was quite calm, and his utterances were distinctly heard by every one as we gathered in a group:

'Baron Miramar thanks his friends, and wishes them good-night.'

The steamers swept by. Erlanger, the tenor, the contralto, were gaping with surprise. I interchanged amicable signals and farewells with our friend in the balcony, and Mdle. Therval vouchsafed him a parting smile. I glanced at Regina. She was looking dangerous. However, she controlled herself so far as to put a good face on the matter for the next few hours. Little else but the adventure was talked of for the remainder of the evening. Erlanger pronounced it a very pretty one. But Mdle. Therval has made herself an enemy for life.

The next morning I received a communication from Regina. She wished to break her contract, which, on certain terms, it was open to her still to do. She had finally determined not to cross the Alps with us, having on reflection made up her mind in favour of the Russian.

'O, the green-eyed monster! I

sighed. 'I have seen a good deal of him, and he is generally in the way. But for once he has done me a service. Mdlla. Visconti goes. I do not want her, and she was getting troublesome. Mdlla. Therval stays. I cannot spare her. And she has declined to become Baroness Miramar. Good for Emanuel Cuscutus!'

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE ICE-QUEEN.

It was in March. The Brereton, who—to quote from a county gossip chronicle recently sprung into existence—had been 'staring' at the West-end during the winter season, were down at Hawkwood for the recess, recruiting respectively from the fatigues of business and of pleasure.

What *was* Brereton's business? At least a standing joke among his friends at the club. He talked gravely of his affairs and engagements, conscientiously believing in their importance, and considered himself very hard-worked. Well, he was president of one society, and on the committee of two or three more. But he contrived habitually to invest the minutest actions of his life with the dignity of business. He read the paper as though a good deal depended on whether he got through it or not; addressed himself to write a note or pay a call as though to the despatch of a public duty, bringing to the performance of the task the same punctuality, circumspection, and care not to commit himself, as though the fate of nations were involved. Then, with a grateful sense of having well earned his repose, he came down to Hawkwood, hunted a little, shot a good

deal, and entertained the county gentry.

His wife was not beloved by the latter. She was too proud. Fortunately for her, she was feared also. People spoke ill of her respectfully and with reserve. 'Foreign ways' was the favourite charge against her; which meant merely that she dressed well, and eschewed a few ancient Hampshire fashions in some of her household arrangements. And no one was more noticed, run after, and, in the main, respected, than the lady of Hawkwood. A coquette, indeed! The ill-natured slander fell dead in her presence. He must be bold or blind who tries to break through that surface of proud cold indifference. Rightly had Val, in his heart, surnamed her the Ice-Queen. He knew her better than most. Yet between the extremes of heat and cold we find it sometimes hard to distinguish.

It was Easter—a gay season, as gaiety goes in Hampshire. But the Ice-Queen was bored—Sir Adolphus perceived it one morning at breakfast, as he was thoughtfully peeling an egg. They were alone—which was the exception at Hawkwood. They had this very day been expecting friends, who, alas, had just written to postpone their visit. It was the first morning they had breakfasted *tête-à-tête*, and Diana was bored. What was her husband to do?

Why, go out; which was what he did as soon as they rose from the table. He was no fool, Sir Adolphus.

Diana betook herself to her morning-room, an apartment on which she has expended money and taste till she is sick of success. A more amiable tabernacle is not to be seen in Hampshire. 'Not quite the proper thing,' thought the parson's wife,

whose puritanical soul was scandalised by so much pleasantness between four walls. And this morning it seemed but vanity and vexation of spirit to its mistress also.

The Ice-Queen is bored. Send for a comet, an aerolite, or phenomenon of some sort, to break the monotony of existence for her. A restless striving after achievement, that never quite dies in her, becomes a torment, perhaps a danger, in vacant, inactive hours, and revives the strangest wishes and fancies in her idle brain. Pity a Cleopatra, a Zenobia, born out of due time and in quiet English home-life.

She had something to look forward to to-day, however, something that induced her to spend the whole morning over her water-colour sketches that Mr. Romer praised so highly. Mr. Romer, of whom she had seen not a little during the winter in London, and who was expected at Hawkwood this afternoon. He had now been in England for eight months, on a visit which Diana intended not to come to an end.

Towards one o'clock she heard wheels approaching up the drive, and recognised the pretty appointments of Mrs. Damian's pony-carriage. Diana laid aside her brushes with a sigh. Death and periodical domiciliary visits from the Damians, whose little country home was within easy driving distance, were two inevitable evils it was useless to resist. And as there had been a longer interval than usual since she had been invaded by her relations, she prepared to receive them with a good grace.

Mrs. Damian and Amy entered with a rush, the mother brimful of lively malice, her needle eyes hupping all over the room in search of something to prick.

'Alone, my dearest Di, and industrious as ever!' she began, with a gushing tenderness that put Di on the alert. 'It was the happiest inspiration to come to-day. You have generally a houseful; and Amy and I, who live as quietly as mice, never think of you but as in a whirl of distractions and festivities. Tell us all you have been doing. We are perishing for some news—something to amuse us, you know.'

Her *abandon* of manner would have blinded a stranger; but Diana had almost instantly surmised the truth,—that she had come, not to hear, but to communicate tidings,—something over which she was secretly exulting.

'What can it be?' thought Diana satirically. 'Has the Princess of Trebizonde proposed for her son? or Amy's *fiancé* lost his elder brother?'

After a quarter of an hour's discursive conversation, Mrs. Damian came out with it, as it were accidentally,

'By the way, we bring a bit of news—good news, and that I know you will be glad to hear for our sakes.'

Diana lifted her eyes inquiringly. Mrs. Damian's twinkled maliciously as she said,

'Gervase.'

'Has fortune favoured him again?' asked Diana carelessly. 'You don't mean to say you have actually secured the little widow with the large jointure?'

'Nay,' rejoined the mother, 'better than that. The widow was a dear little creature, but underbred—terribly underbred, you know. The long and short of the present matter is, that poor dear Otho's unfortunate investment seems likely to turn out well at last. You know what a wretched concern it has been. I never abandoned all hope myself;

but Gervase was so convinced it was a bubble that had burst, that only the other day he was going to part with the whole thing for a mere song, when a whisper reached him 'to wait,' and she proceeded to detail the unforeseen circumstances which had so worked as to convert a comparatively valueless property into a substantial source of income.

'Fortunate indeed,' Diana responded, sincerely this time. 'The widow with her thousands was well enough; but I quite agree with you, that thousands without the widow is far, far better.'

'You know me, Di,' said Mrs. Damian impressively, 'that I am the least mercenary person in the world. Yet I cannot express what a weight this news has taken off my mind. I don't mind telling you now that I have been very unhappy about him ever since he went back to Germany.'

'On what account?' she asked curiously.

'He is restless and dissatisfied. A perfect disgust for his profession seems growing upon him. He says he is sick of court cabals and petty intrigues, and that he is tired to death of being chiefly known as a leader of cotillions. The plain truth is, Di, he ought to marry. But he is so fastidious. One affair after another I have undertaken for him, and all have fallen through, as you know. Gervase will choose for himself. Now he is free to choose where he pleases.'

'Ah,' said Diana, 'even if his choice, like King Cophetua's, should fall on a beggar-maid.'

Mrs. Damian shrank aghast.

'What do you mean? Gervase marry beneath him! It would kill me. But you know how ambitious girls are in these days—or their parents for them—and Gervase is as proud as Lucifer—think

now how his position is altered for the better! If he remains in the service, it will be with surer prospects of advancement. If he leaves it, it will be to settle down. He is now a good *parti* for any woman in the world—may court and win whom he pleases.'

'If he can get her good-will,' put in Diana.

'I have never known him fail there—when it was worth the winning.'

The announcement of luncheon checked the repartees just as they threatened to become pointed. Luncheon, of course, was an important event in Sir Adolphus's day. The story of the fortunate turn in Gervase's affairs was told again, and the Baronet delivered himself of some laboured and effective felicitations. The topic occupied the conversation till the visitors took leave—Mrs. Damian with renewed expressions of pleasure and surprise at having found the master and mistress of Hawkwood alone.

Simple Sir Adolphus hastened to relate how their promised guests—the Topnottes—who were sufficiently great guns keenly to interest Mrs. Damian, had been unavoidably detained by illness.

'And Romer, whom we asked to meet them, coming this afternoon,' he ejaculated suddenly, turning to his wife. 'I forgot him. Dear me! how very unlucky!'

'Mr. Romer—to meet the Topnottes!' repeated Mrs. Damian, in a tone of infinite surprise.

'At their particular request,' Sir Adolphus explained. 'The old lord contemplates some important alterations in his chapel, and wants Romer to undertake the design. But, upon my word, Diana, we should have done much better to put him off till next week,—when he must be here to see to the setting up of his foun-

tain,' he explained, turning to Mrs. Damian.

Diana took out her watch.

'Yes, why did we not think of it this morning?' she said carelessly. 'It is late now,' and Sir Adolphus was left comparing clocks and watches and timetables, and making complex calculations about trains and telegrams, while the ladies exchanged affectionate adieux.

'I think Diana should be careful whom she asks to Hawkwood,' said Mrs. Damian, slashing the pony spitefully, as she and Amy drove off. 'I hear Mr. Romer is there constantly. He gives her lessons in London. They say she is for ever at his studio, and constantly seen driving with him in her carriage.'

'I do not believe it,' said the mild Amy; 'it is only horrid gossip.'

'O, there's no accounting for tastes. I have known one or two others who had a fancy for the society of artists and singers, and did not mind compromising themselves in that fashion. But it is very *infra dig.*; and I never should have thought that Diana—'

'Mamma, mamma, for shame!' expostulated poor Amy, startled out of filial deference, as she not unfrequently was, by her mother's extravagances. 'How can you say such things of Diana? Why are you always so bitter against her?'

'Amy, Amy, what a little goose you are! I shall never forgive her, *never!* With a wife like that, Gervase might have been Prime Minister some day!'

Val Romer, though outside the notice of the Hampshire press, had also been 'starring' at the West-end these six months. To all appearances the artist was flourishing exceedingly. The tree

knows first when something is amiss with the root.

He was in London, to give it a trial as a home, and had been treated there right royally. He was pressed with commissions, and from the highest quarters. Pleasant notoriety had turned his head a little. He seemed on his way to become the fashionable art-exponent of his generation, the spoilt child of rich people, great people, cultured people—to unite the prestige of a man of genius with that of a man of the world. A lure.

But for this he must melt himself down, to be recast in a different mould. So much he had already discovered, to his cost. The mainspring of society is self-repression; the vitality of art is self-assertion and free expansion. Among men of genius the smooth, flexible, symmetrical nature, that can find in the madding crowd a congenial, healthful element, is rare. Val was as smooth as a gnarled oak, and as flexible as its branches. His unequal nature rose to great heights certainly, but at the expense of depression here and there. He had lapses of vacancy, irritability, and oddity—the reaction from extreme tension of the imaginative faculties—states of mental disorder, during which the effort to be pleasant and conversational cost so much as to unfit him for work the next day. Then he had a way of disappointing his patrons. The peacock was secured, a host of jackdaws were collected to come and behold; and lo, and lo, the perverse bird would not spread its tail for admiration! He must subdue these little insubordinations of spirit, if he were ever to occupy the position he dimly sighted, and that Lady Brereton wished him to occupy. His originality was of a kind to stand in

his way. He must clip it and prune it and pare it. What would follow?

Why, he said to himself, that a very few more years of this, and he, Val Romer, would have sunk into a most ordinary personage, an alderman of art—growing stout and sleek—modelling flattering likenesses at fancy prices of whomsoever could afford to pay. The strong prosaic tendency in his temperament would be fostered and become dominant, the ideal element sacrificed, the kernel of his merit gone. There are those who can only give the world their best work by keeping out of the world's disturbing influence.

What wedded him to it! For one thing, a friendship there—a relation, but for which he might have thrown up the game as soon as begun, simply because the new atmosphere disagreed with him, and the process of acclimatisation was unpleasant.

Some such thoughts were coursing through his mind as he drove from the station to Hawkwood.

*'Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?'*

Well, well, he was invited to meet the Topnottes: the most enlightened, as well as the most liberal, of art-patrons; and he was to superintend the placing of his fountain—no need to inquire further into motives.

Hawkwood was a house exactly to Val's mind—not large or showy, but solid and comfortable—a house built to live in, not to look at. Coming out of the chill evening air, he thought the warm hospitable-looking hall a goodly sight. He was ushered into the drawing-room—a picture of English comfort and un-English elegance combined—where Diana sat, bending over a novel, raising her head quickly, as the guest was announced.

'Ah, Mr. Romer!'—with an accent of surprise that took him aback.

'What! Did you not expect me?' he rejoined. 'I wrote—'

Diana, smiling faintly at his incorrigible simplicity, interposed reassuringly, extending her hand,

'O yes, we expected you. Only one disappointment always prepares one for a second; and I am sorry to say our other friends have failed. The Topnottes cannot come.'

Val expressed his disappointment more unreservedly than Diana thought strictly courteous; but such subtleties were beyond him. He took a chair by the fire, facing her.

'Any news?' she asked presently. 'Arrivals from London are always supposed to come laden with intelligence.'

Val had an evening paper, which he at once produced. Men are so literal. The items of news it furnished did not seem to interest Lady Brereton in the slightest degree. Women are so perverse.

They thawed by degrees as they sat there in the firelight, Val staring at the crackling logs, glancing at intervals at his hostess.

'Spring is cold in the country, is it not?' she said presently. 'Are you sighing for Rome and the Villa Marta?'

'The poor Villa Marta!' he ejaculated; 'it seems very far off to me now.' Farther off, somehow, just then than heaven or hell.

'The lemon-groves and cypresses and marble columns,' she said, with a little shiver. 'Don't you long for them?'

'Not at this moment, not on a cold day,' he replied, warming his hands over the logs.

'When do you go back there?'



'It is let till July,' he said evasively.

'Ah! Sometimes I fear you have had enough, or too much, of England—of London—already,' she insinuated gently.

'It is too noisy for me,' he confessed, after a pause. 'I like to have plenty of room—room to think.'

'I understand,' she said. 'You mean the circle is too large, the crowd of thoughtless commonplace people thronging round you, to whom you are indifferent. But, after all, what does it signify how large may be the *outside* ring of one's acquaintances? They never really come near one. And the *inner* circle—of people who can really affect one's happiness—is everywhere and for everybody very small indeed. Whether in London or Rome, it is limited to a few.'

'Very true.'

'It seems to me,' she continued, talking fluently, frankly, to put him at his ease, 'that no amount of mere additions to one's visiting-list has any real effect on one's life, no more than fifty more or less in a theatre can matter to the actor in a play. But with the inner circle of friends that I spoke of it is different. Any addition to that makes an epoch in one's life, like the discovery of a new little world,' she concluded playfully, rising and crossing to the window, Val watching her graceful movements admiringly, as she leaned out, listening for the tread of her husband's horse. She had just caught the sound coming up the drive.

Then she returned to her seat, and flashed a look across at her guest, saying,

'Do you not think so?'

'Yes. An epoch, for good or evil.'

You are very cautious,' she

said. 'As for me, I don't forecast the worst that may happen. A new world or a new acquaintance may have perils. I could forget them in the charm of adventure and discovery.'

The occurrence together of Sir Adolphus and the dressing-bell left Diana with the last word of the dialogue, over which Val puzzled agreeably for the next half-hour.

Dinner was less smooth sailing. Diana had asked a few friends, of the 'outer ring'—the clergyman and his wife, a retired officer, an invaluable fellow-sportsman for Sir Adolphus on his shooting expeditions—good-natured people, always ready to officiate as padding, slyly nicknamed 'Adelphi guests' by the Breretons, but needed to-night to harmonise the circle. Sir Adolphus and Val did not 'get on.' The sculptor depreciated the ex-civil servant, whose merits he set off to the worst advantage. Feeble as a wit, faded as a beau, the host, contrasted with that piece of organic energy opposite, looked like a Roman patrician of the decadence entertaining his Visigoth conqueror. Sir Adolphus talked platitudes. Val hated them, and, forgetting himself, would come out with a set-down that would have taxed another's good-nature severely. But Sir Adolphus's was infinite, and he looked tolerant, feeling one must make allowance for Romer.

Val, whilst dressing, had made fifty good resolutions. He would talk little, not lay down the law at all, give in to Sir Adolphus when he could, and, when he could not, maintain a dignified reserve. Why must the parson introduce the subject of politics? Sir Adolphus talked like a well-informed dullard; Val, like a clever ignoramus, which is as

much as to say he got the worst of it. Sir Adolphus confounded him with statistics, appealed to 'well-known' facts Val had never heard of in his life, referred to reports, Blue-books, correspondence, intrenched himself on ground whither Val could not follow him, or followed floundering helplessly. Irritated and unconvinced, he rushed into exaggeration and paradox. Easy now for the other to put him down with a word or forbearing silence, and the humiliating condescension one shows for a big baby.

Diana came to the rescue, with a phrase or two, giving a playful satiric turn to the subject; delighting her husband with her wit, forcing Val to smile, inclining both to follow her lead to safer ground. Not content with restoring good-humour, she insensibly led round the conversation to topics with which Val was more, Sir Adolphus less, conversant; and the tables were turned, with great advantage to both parties.

Val, though but half understanding the service rendered by her tact, felt dimly grateful to her for something. His hostess had set herself the task of making the visit agreeable to him, and pleasant day after pleasant day flew by—he hardly knew how.

Again, she, and she only, suspected what an infliction for him would be the grand afternoon gathering of friends and neighbours to inaugurate his fountain—the ostensible object of his visit.

'You will see all the county on our lawn to-day,' she warned him laughingly, when the fatal morning came. 'Don't be too severe upon us and our rustic stupidity. You can afford to be magnanimous, I think.'

Val submitted to be on his

good behaviour from three to six—to be introduced to every one, not to snub the somebodies, to talk to the people he was expected to talk to, and not to talk to Lady Brereton at all. He knew what she wished of him without being told. The hints, manœuvres, half-words, that coming to him from others were wasted or worse, he was learning to catch and interpret, when they emanated from her, with an adroitness worthy of a woman or a diplomat. Decidedly Diana's pupil was getting on.

He was rewarded. It is true the afternoon brought him some curious unflattering discoveries on the limits of fame, and the insignificance of even a distinguished artist out of his own people,—that is, the small minority to whom the pleasures of art have an appreciable value in life. Mr. Romer not being yet dead and a classic, his fame as a sculptor availed him nothing to forestall the respect of the squires and squires of Hampshire. It was open to him to recommend himself, if he knew how, by good manners and pleasant conversation. So well did he get on that he ended by enjoying himself amazingly, and taking a liking to these good folks. Patiently he listened to well-meant but inconceivably ignorant criticisms, gave polite answers to depreciating questions on his craft, and satisfied the curiosity of more than one old lady on the processes of sculpture by treating her to a detailed account. Everybody was cordial, everybody was agreeable and intelligent. Was he fired with an ambition to become like one of these?—to turn landowner, and play the country gentleman sometimes, fancying he should succeed?

The fête was now drawing to a

close, the guests dispersing. Sir Adolphus was escorting the last fat old lady to her carriage. Val, his ordeal over, remained with a look of pleasure and animation on his countenance that amused Lady Brereton, who was watching him.

'I am going to the Springs,' she said; so they called the lakelet over which Val's statues presided. 'It seems to me I have been looking at your statues all the afternoon, and showing them off to my friends, and yet have not seen them myself.'

She stepped out on the lawn, Val accompanying her; and they strolled down the shrubberies, leading away to the park woods and the lakelet.

'You have been very good to us this afternoon, Mr. Romer,' she said to him, as they walked along.

'I have been so happy,' said Val, with a *naïveté* at which she laughed in a way that piqued him to add,

'Is it so strange? Have you never been happy in your life?'

'O yes; and I have been a child. But I might as well wish myself ten years old again as for pleasure to come to me so easily.'

'You must be singularly unfortunate in your experience.'

'Or singularly exacting in my taste. People who will only be happy when, where, and how they choose cannot be happy often. Perhaps their enjoyment, when they get it, is the keener.'

'It is vulgarity, of course,' said he presently, 'to suppose that mere wealth and luxury can be enough to satisfy a human soul. Still—' He hesitated.

In his opinion a queen like herself, able to exalt, put down, patronise, delight, terrify, and tyrannise, ought not to find life dull. He was too diffident to

speak out. She did so for him.

'I see you think my exactions unreasonable,' she said, 'and that I should be content as I am. Isn't it so?'

They had reached the Springs, an oblong sheet of still water, fringed with laurels, with tall silver firs behind. A clump of beeches stood at the head, and dipped their twigs into the water. On the soft turf bank at the side, Val's fountain had been erected. They came and stood opposite, to look at it across the water.

'Nay,' said Val, 'even power will not gratify you if you despise your subjects.'

'Ah, you think I despise people.'

'I know it.'

His audacity, far from displeasing her, provoked one of her rare flashes of earnest.

'And are they not despicable—men and women? so feeble and petty and mean.'

'Those who filled your grounds this afternoon?' he asked, rallying.

'Those who filled my grounds to-day. Well, yes. Why should they be exceptions?'

'I felt myself very small among them, I know,' he confessed. 'Wondered how I could ever have been such a fool as to think myself clever. They talk so nicely and well, and have questions and answers always ready. I feel my mental inferiority.'

'Mr. Romer, if your time had not been better spent than in studying general society, you would have observed, as I have, that it is the smaller minds mostly who find their level there. Original and independent persons rather despise it, or find it irksome. Nine-tenths of such intercourse must be commonplace. The charm of society is to make com-

monplaces attractive, and those people who don't disdain to devote their faculties to this are the invaluable members. That is why women, who are pettier and less original than men, will always rule society. And as to men, among those ready wits and good talkers you spoke of, there is perhaps not one capable of anything really great. You, Mr. Romer—well, I should like to think you were different. If I am wrong, I shall ask you not to undeceive me.'

It would be hard to resist such delicate flattery as this. It was sincere, that was the worst of it, though playfully spoken.

'You would like to think of me, then, as a blockhead in society,' he said whimsically.

'Nay, in society what you please; but, apart from it, capable of startling things such as one reads about, but which I have reason to think as incredible as the exploits of Sindbad the Sailor.'

'Instance.'

'Well,' she said meditatively. 'To me, Othello, Romeo, or their originals—all men, in fact, who ever staked their lives for a sentiment—an idea, are myths in every sense. They never existed; at any rate, they exist no longer.'

Val said, reflecting gravely,

'They were always exceptions. They may be rarer now than ever, very likely; but they were scarce in any age, and they have representatives still.'

'Are you sure?'

'Quite sure.'

'You must forgive me if I am incredulous.' She hesitated, and continued, with growing vivacity, 'You have heard people call me cold and heartless, cynical. Frankly, you have.'

Val looked down, embarrassed, and smiled.

'What if I have?'

'Or worse—say I am selfish, incapable of friendship and feeling. But lay it to their half-heartedness, not mine. True, I care too little for faint sympathy to accept it. Nothing short of whole friendship, entirely devoted, could ever compel from me a like return.' She spoke it slowly, with frank significance.

Val had a moment of vertigo. Probably he had been looking down too long into the deep water. The sky seemed to be coming down, the marble figures of his Water Babies opposite to move and smile. He said—what could he say? something extremely foolish.

'That idea—would be worth the stake, whatever it was.'

The portly figure of Sir Adolphus was seen approaching under the beeches at the head of the pond. Diana called to him to come and join them; the spot where she and Mr. Romer were standing afforded the best view of the fountain. The self-possession of some ladies is beyond all praise.

Val's head was gone for the evening. Diana had never seen him so dull and inert at dinner. Sir Adolphus thought he had never been so pleasant. He did not contradict once, and listened to the platitudes of his host with a patience that was unprecedented. Val felt inclined to pinch himself to know if he were asleep or awake. He was silent, as perhaps the safest mode of concealing his preoccupation. There were one or two other guests present, but he held aloof. In the course of the evening Diana saw him poring for some while over a newspaper, and she saw also that he was not reading it.

One among the items of news before him in print suddenly attracted his attention. He let fall

an involuntary exclamation. Lady Brereton was hovering near. She just glanced over his shoulder, and instantly singled out the paragraph on which he had pitched.

'Mdlle. Laurence Therval is at Bleiburg, for the Easter Musical Festival, previous to coming to England, where she will pass the remainder of the season.'

Val got no further. That name had power yet, it seemed, to judge from the expression of his countenance. He put down the newspaper hastily, but Diana read on. There followed a list of the great personages and potentates expected to attend the festival. Instinctively she sought among them for the name of the petty sovereign at whose Court her cousin was just now *chargé d'affaires*.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### OLD FRIENDS AND NEW FOES.

It was the last day of the Bleiburg Musical Festival. The performances had extended over nearly a month. We English swallow our pleasures alive. The Germans cut up and consume theirs conscientiously and with deliberation. Cuscus was there with his band of chosen artistes, choicest among whom was a girl that had startled her old student-home, Bleiburg, out of its sober senses. For three weeks it had talked of nothing else.

Herr Emanuel's long and successfully-conducted tour in the Fatherland was drawing to a close. He and a select few of his party were leaving for England shortly. Then for Laurence would begin a fresh campaign—six weeks of London concerts—after which she would be free.

Some said it was time already.

For a year now she had been on the wing—through Austria, Sweden, Germany in turn; taxed, and willingly taxing herself, to the utmost. She had been incessantly before the public, sustaining her reputation where it was established, creating it where she came as a stranger. Everywhere she had triumphed. At what cost to herself no one asked, no one could know. But whether it were prolonged over-exertion, nerve-tension, the strain of excitement, or the too fervent insistence of will over secret depression and exhaustion, that she was fighting now against a threatened collapse of physical strength it was no longer in her power to conceal. People said she was killing herself, and flocked to hear her with redoubled alacrity, as their manner is.

She would play, and play admirably, up to the last, but by dint of draining the very springs of nervous energy. You may draw on the principal, so to speak, of the vital powers when the interest runs short; but you risk bankruptcy in so doing. She would die, said the poetical; she would have to give up the violin, said the prosaical; but both agreed as to the impending cloud.

Cuscus saw it first, and is haunted by desponding apprehensions. Sometimes it seems to him that she *must* break down before her engagement is up. Sincerely desirous for her welfare though he had become, his pecuniary interests were too intimately involved for his feelings to be purely disinterested. That contract had proved a capital speculation for him so far. But England was still unachieved; and in his calculations he had counted on the nation of shopkeepers for a splendid commercial success.

Only by next July would his last hundred pounds be safe in his pocket, and Mdlle. Therval, her compact fulfilled, at liberty to fall ill, or die, or go off, as Fate should determine.

Bleiburg, quiet conservative Bleiburg, had undergone vast changes in ten years. It was now an important station and centre, with a new theatre, and a new hotel, the Europa, with gardens going down to the river—a palace in lath and plaster, where all the grandees and other strangers come over for the festival were lodged, among them the august personage who represented majesty on the occasion, and who, since his arrival last night, with a train of officials, major and minor, had divided pretty equally with Mdlle. Therval the attention of the crowd.

Cuscus and his company had been faithful to the old-established, old-fashioned Golden Eagle; and here, at two o'clock on that last festival afternoon, sat the director in the reading-room, and, whilst awaiting the assembling of his flock together, he sifted the newspapers for musical gossip. Here was a London journal a fortnight old, that gave the particulars of the recent signal failure, on the London stage, of Mdlle. Visconti, whose first appearance, heralded by a great flourish of trumpets, had proved her last in that country—resulting in so disastrous a fiasco as had impelled her to leave England at once. Cuscus had shown this paragraph to Laurence last night. He had a vast experience of women, and was convinced that, in the misfortunes of their female friends at least, there is always something not displeasing to them. This time, however, the pleasure was to Cuscus alone, who might re-congratulate himself that the star-singer in question—

now a falling star, it appeared—had, by the special intervention of his old friend Providence, parted from him in a huff before he had suffered any loss through her fast-waning popularity. Glancing over the *Strangers' Diary*, what should he spy but the lady's name among the list of yesterday's arrivals at the Europa! And—'Think of some people, and lo, they appear'—looking out into the street, he saw an open carriage drive by, with a convoy of showily-dressed ladies and moustached cavaliers, from the Europa—theatrical people, Cuscus perceived at a glance—among whom he descried a pink-bonneted head, with a golden chevelure, and a face he had seen before, but that provoked from him some ungallant remarks on the instability of female beauty.

Turning round, he confronted his violin-player, who had just come in, ready dressed for the concert. There was a sunbeam-like beauty there that would only fade with her life. Cuscus shook his head all the same. These ethereal creatures, that neither age nor tarnish, may suddenly, like the sunbeam, give you the slip altogether.

Till now she had prevailed, and so steadily, that he had come to repose an almost superstitious confidence in her powers. To-day, as if to challenge and put to rebuke the last sceptics or detractors, she had selected to play some of the most trying pieces in a violinist's *répertoire*,—compositions certain to tax the finest faculties, and lay bare any weak point. The test would be no light one.

The theatre was crowded in every part. Mdlle. Visconti and friends were crammed into a little box somewhere near the roof. When Laurence came on, Linda witnessed her enthusiastic recep-



tion tolerably unmoved. Between herself and an artist of that calibre she was conscious now of such a disparity of purpose as hardly admitted of emulation or envy. One thing she grudged her—her youthful beauty unimpaired.

It was, in fact, neither from private interest in her friend of yore, nor yet from professional interest in the performance, that Linda had been drawn to attend the concert at all. From the first moment of entering the theatre her opera-glasses were directed at a large centre box, with crimson velvet hangings and projecting gilt crown overhead, with a perseverance that provoked at last the notice and the *persiflage* of her companions.

Had she never seen a Grand Duke before, they asked, that she could not take her eyes off his bald head? Linda laughed, but continued her scrutiny without intermission. It was not the potentate, however, but one of the foreigners belonging to the ducal party, whom she was observing—as keenly as the object of her observation was watching the girl who had just appeared on the platform.

Of the music, Linda, from that moment, heard not a note. That other listener, on the contrary, was all attention: rapt—as indeed was every one but herself—it was natural he should be attentive. But there was a look on his face betokening a near interest—something more indeed, something she could not fathom, but that affected her very strangely. Her heart began to throb with wild wayward jealousy and resentment. Wild, indeed! He was only caught by the general passing *furor*.

Then, suddenly, it all flashed upon her. Gervase—Rome—Laurence. That winter and spring Laurence had passed there also.

The coincidence, which hitherto had scarcely had sufficient interest for Linda to stay in her memory, struck her all at once in a new light; a world of conjecture opened itself to her imagination. She saw and judged Laurence through the distorting medium of her own oblique mind.

She dropped her lorgnette now, and leaned on her hand moodily, full of mixed, bitter, cynical, yet heart-burning reflections. She had been a fool to care, ever—thrice a fool to have dreamt of winning him back.

The concert was but half over, when Linda rose abruptly. She was tired, she said, and should not wait for the second part of the programme, but go back to the hotel. Why stay to witness Laurence's second triumph, endure the unendurable, and perhaps betray herself to her quizzing friends? One of the gentlemen escorted her out of the building, put her into a carriage, and she drove back to the Europa, musing dismally.

On arriving, her first step was to summon her faithful handmaid. Virginie was evergreen still, and, to her credit be it spoken, she clung closer than ever to her mistress in adversity. Linda sent her off to the theatre on a private errand, and awaited the result in her room on an upper story of the Europa, leaning on the window-sill, looking out on the gardens full of flowering shrubs going down to the Saale, and with rapidly-sinking spirits. Thought was not in her line, no more than it pertained to yonder swans lazily skimming the river's smooth surface. She was depressed by a feeling of everything taking leave of her in which she had trusted—youth, beauty, pleasure, triumph, excitement; and, these away, what were she and her life?

Virginie was gone but a quarter of an hour. She reëntered, and Linda looked up with an impatient,

'Well?'

'The *signore*,' said Virginie mysteriously, 'as soon as the concert was over, got separated from his party. Most of them drove off in different carriages to the promenade to see the torchlight procession and illuminations. He walked straight to the Golden Eagle, and inquired if Mdlle. Therval had returned.'

Linda started up. Virginie proceeded,

'She had not. He said he wished to see her, as he was leaving early to-morrow, and would wait. He gave his card, and the porter showed him into the little front room on the ground-floor, which is Mdlle. Therval's *salotto*. O, it is a dream, that room! The tables, the sills, stuffed full of flowers she has received. The windows so crowded with bouquets and plants that I could scarcely see inside; but one smelt the roses out in the street!'

'That will do,' said Linda sharply. For a few minutes she remained, brooding sullenly; then roused herself, saying, 'Come, help me to change my dress. The others will be back to supper directly.'

When the last cheers had died away in the theatre, Laurence, behind the scenes, stood there, receiving compliments extraordinary on her success. There was but one word for it, they said; and, at all events, it was certain they could find but one—*colossal*. So spake German artist after German artist, German amateur after German amateur, as they came up to her with this majestic adjective on their lips. It was the worst moment of her life.

For she felt like one who has

strained every nerve to climb to the top of a pinnacle, reached it, but only to be seized with vertigo, and fall headlong. She had surprised herself as well as her audience, but she had touched the tidemark of her highest force. The reaction was coming now in proportion to the unnatural strain. She felt as though she could not have played another note, had her life depended on it. Her head was confused; her hands, her frame trembled. 'I have done what I could,' she thought despairingly, as she seemed to see the end of her fighting power at last.

Cuscus and the rest were going to drive about to see the festivities, but she parted from them at the hotel. She felt tired and faint. On the threshold the porter met her with a card: 'A stranger waiting to see Mdlle. Therval.' Laurence took the card mechanically, with a weary sigh.

Then her face lit up in the dusk; her heart bounded so that she lost breath. She did not stop to think or wonder how the thing had come to pass, but went straight in, as though it were to meet Felicia or Cherubina. It was always but half light in that little room. The windows in the narrow street were overshadowed by the high houses opposite; moreover, as Virginie had reported, there was a flowery screen before the panes, a wall of delicate ferns and purple clematis, and roses whose fragrance spread far and wide. Laurence opened the door and entered quite softly, standing before Gervase ere he was aware of her presence, so that it was she who surprised him at last.

'Forgive me, forgive me, for letting you leave me!' The agitated words rushed impulsively from his lips. 'I might know—you might know—I should never

love anything on this earth so much. Trust me with your hand and your love !'

Laurence, without replying, let him clasp her hand, with a strange sense of rescue and reanimation. She strove to be firm and collected, but in vain. She put her hand to her forehead ; a dizziness came over her for a moment ; the next, and she sat there on the sofa—Gervase beside her—their hands were locked ; nor men nor gods should part them this time, was what he swore to himself. Laurence felt her spirits revive.

'It was that, then,' she said, looking up bewildered. 'You were there to-day. How did I know it ? I did know it to-day as I played.'

Gervase, taking her face in his hands, kissed her passionately again and again, saying,

'Yes, it was I. I wanted to speak to you across them all—my heart to yours, Renza. As you played, I felt an appeal there, in your music, to which I only had the response.'

The girl drooped her head, with a half-scared smile of too much delight.

'Child,' he said fondly and wistfully, 'how pale you are ! What have you been doing with yourself ? You always looked more like heaven than earth, but you look now as though earth had no part in you.'

Her beauty indeed was fast taking a perilously delicate character. Her complexion seemed to him too transparent, her features etherealised, her hands too thin and white, and a terrible fear came upon him that, now he had sought her out, resolved to make her his own for ever, it was too late ; and if he held her, it was only to see her escape into a star or a cloud, and so vanish out of his sight.

Her smile reassured him. Joy is your best miracle-worker.

'I have been so unhappy,' she said, 'so much alone. It was killing me—stifling me ; but I shall be well now. O, I am stronger than you think.'

'But every one's strength has an end,' he said, smiling—'even yours. Music is too hard a master for you sometimes, Laurence.'

'It is not that ; but I have been living in the dark. To forget and be forgotten—that is hard sometimes.'

He was going to speak. She stopped him with a sign. He understood. Enough for that moment to know he was there, to feel it was his will to unite his lot with hers.

'Renza,' he whispered at last.

She raised her face, and saw his eyes glistening with a strange exultation ; it was with the very enthusiasm of passion that he spoke.

'I will let go everything for you and our love. Say I may love and live for you only.'

It was dark and still in that little room. Outside a noisy torchlight procession was filing down the street ; the fitful glare of the burning brands flashed on the walls, and the students' songs rang in the air as the merry-makers marched past under the window.

The sounds died away in the distance. Then she answered low,

'I love you, I trust you, I could die for you. It is for my life.'

'And mine.'

Presently footsteps and voices were heard in the courtyard. Laurence started up. It was her own party returning. They two must part hurriedly. There would be no more meeting till England ; but, after that, no parting any more.

Gervase walked back to his hotel in a state of supreme elation. He loved Renza madly. That dreary year of absence had sufficed to bring home to him the conviction that the opportunity of his life lay here—in bold recognition of the exceptional happiness opened up to him, in this instance, by an exceptional step. How everything had played into his hands at last, to help him to reconcile that step with his old self—his fastidiously educated tastes and habits.

He had a thousand times more to lose in his own world than most men, and to make him reluctant to alter his position there for the worse. The luxuries of ease and culture were, in his idea, as indispensable to a man's life as food and firing, and his nurture and experience had indisposed, if not unfitted him for struggles and obscurity. That sort of relative property, which had hampered him hitherto—a clog to ambition in his expensive profession, a tacit injunction to marry for money—was removed, at an unexpected and opportune moment. He was free to withdraw from a career which had long failed to satisfy him. He was enabled to mould his future according to his own fancy.

Was that not better any day, he thought gaily, than a consulate in some god-forgotten place—South America or the Balkans—perhaps to die there of fever or be murdered by insurrectionists?

When he reached the Europa, he stepped out into the gardens, just to compose himself a little in the shade and the cool, before joining his friends inside. Their excellencies were not fresh from a love-scene.

He found the garden deserted, but for a gay party of some half-dozen idlers, enjoying an evening

stroll. Their loud voices and laughter resounded through the shrubberies, and Gervase instinctively kept out of the way, turning off into the little by-walks whenever he caught a glimpse of the pink dresses and fierce mustachios approaching, unconscious that the pertinacity with which he avoided them was provoking their notice and banter.

'There goes a solitudinarian,' said one. 'What is he thinking of that he fights so shy of his kind? How to break off a love-affair, eh?'

'As if so much thought was required for that? laughed one of the ladies fair. 'I say he is writing a five-act play.'

'It's a German professor, composing a work on philosophy.'

'Or a conspirator. Two to one he's a conspirator.'

'Done!' said the first speaker. 'What do you wager that I accost him, and have the question decided?' And he turned up a side-path, so as to intercept the *flâneur* in his walk. The others followed. Linda, seized with an inkling of the stranger's identity, would have stopped her madcap friend, but it was too late. The young quiz stood before Gervase, and, lifting his hat politely,

'Monsieur,' he said.

Gervase looked up interrogatively, taking his cigarette from his lips.

'A florin for your thoughts. You will excuse the liberty; but for some time we have been lost in admiration at the constancy with which you pursue your meditations,—and speculating what can possibly be the subject—of such absorbing interest. . . . No offence, I assure you,' growing feebler and feebler in his banter, wavering in his effrontery, stammering, then coming to a dead halt at last, horrified, as, through

the dusk, he thought to recognise one whom he had seen this morning in friendly conversation with the august personage. Supposing he had gone and insulted an ambassador!

Much to his relief, there came a good-humoured reply, in his own tone of mock gravity,

'I am sorry to disappoint Monsieur; but when I smoke, the reflections I make are strictly between me and my cigarette.'

Gervase had now seen Linda, and they exchanged distant salutations. Her companions—masculine and feminine—seemed taken with an immense fancy for this extemporised acquaintance. They stuck to him, rather to his annoyance, and were not all at once to be shaken off. They insisted on his walking down with them to the river's edge to see the water-fowl. Here Linda stood apart, absently throwing stones into the water. Her friends were teasing the swans, enticing them on land, to enjoy the spectacle of their awkward evolutions. The noisy merriment evoked by the sport made a safe cover for Linda's voice, as she said to Gervase, who was nearest her,

'What is the matter with you this evening? You look very much disturbed.'

It was herself who so looked; he was serenity by comparison.

'You must recollect,' he said, 'this meeting took me entirely by surprise.'

'You took it quietly enough,' she replied tauntingly.

'I have not your liking for scenes,' he said, slightly irritated.

Linda was now throwing stones rather viciously.

'Nor did you seem pleased,' she said; and as Gervase did not instantly disclaim, she burst out, in a low agitated tone, 'There, I knew it—I knew it! I told you so in

Rome; you denied it. You hate me—you wish I was dead. If I thought that, I could kill those I had to thank for it, you know.'

Gervase made a slight gesture of impatience. Linda felt ashamed, despairing. She knew she was alienating him at every word by her childish violence, yet clung to her hope—an insane hope that this doomed love might rise from the dead.

'You detest me. Why don't you say so?' she repeated. 'It is all over, and you would give the world for it never to have been.'

'Linda, be reasonable,' he urged, distracted.

'Reasonable! I? and she laughed. 'Now was it ever my forte?' looking at him with something of the old petulant charm.

'No; that it certainly was not,' he returned promptly, but good-naturedly. 'I wish only you would not talk and conduct yourself in this wild way.'

'How can I help it?' she complained; 'now I know you care for me no longer; now you look at me as if I was somebody else; turn away impatiently when I talk, as if you wished you could send me out of the world. You promised always to be the same to me—at least, until you married,' she ended imploringly.

His silence made her look up; his resolutely placid expression made her exclaim,

'You are going to marry.'

'And if I were?' he said.

Linda flared up. Some fierce feeling choked her utterance. Another moment, and a torrent of injurious reproaches would have burst; but one of her friends ran up, familiarly placing his hand on Gervase's shoulder, and imploring leave to draw his attention to the antics of the swan—so very comical.

Two minutes afterwards, when

Gervase was able to observe Linda again, she seemed to have recovered herself. But the expression her face had taken was so strange, so forbidding, that it prompted him before quitting her to let fall a few grave, deprecating words.

No answer, not another syllable would she give. Earnest, banter, reproach, advice, he tried alike in vain. She continued to stare into the water, throwing stones. By and by her comrades raised a shout—

‘Mind, Regina, you’ve hit the swan!’

She shrugged her shoulders.

‘I want to hurt something or somebody.’

The words were meant for Gervase; but he was already out of hearing.

‘It’s cold,’ she said to the others. ‘I shall go in now.’

She went to her room. Virginie was concerned for her mistress, who, she saw, was in a white rage; for, tearless and speechless, Linda sent her humble *confidante* out of the room—a rare and alarming precaution. Virginie had seen her in these fits of anger scores of times. Nothing in the least tragic had ever come of them; and yet they frightened the elderly *soubrette*, who crossed herself as she shut the door, shaking her head and muttering, as usual,

‘She will do herself or somebody else a mischief one of these days.’

When Linda had recovered from the stupefaction of mixed amazement, disappointment, jealousy, and bitter ill-will, her passion found vent in tears of rage.

‘Her!’ she cried. ‘If it had been one of his own people, I could have borne it. But what is she

higher than myself or better than myself? Ah, it must be that she is the better hypocrite.’

Reason, compunction, everything was swept away in the blinding storm of passion. She spared herself nothing. Her fancy conjured up a vision of Laurence in England: *fêted*, adored, respected, perhaps pronounced by the most aristocratic society in the world as not unworthy of Gervase Damian’s hand. It is just there that such things happen. The world might look on and approve.

But not his own relations! Little as Linda knew of these, something whispered there would be fierce opposition in that quarter.

‘His mother,’ she thought,—‘can she know? She would stop it if she could.’

An idea, that! In the ferment of venomous emotions, a slave to animosity, she was ready to follow its dictates unshrinkingly. She went and rummaged among her papers for an address she recollected to have once discovered and noted down, more from curiosity than any design.

‘Mrs. Damian, Pomeroy Lodge, —, Hampshire.’

Without pausing an instant to consider, she sat down and penned the longest letter she ever wrote in her life.

The next morning she spent some time over another, the despatch of which she intrusted to Virginie, who beheld with pleasure that it was addressed to an old friend, Count Janowski, at Monte Carlo.

‘Has the *signora* made up her mind to him at last?’ thought Virginie, brightening. ‘I always told her she could not do better,’ she concluded ambiguously.



## LOVE AND WAR.\*

By R. MOUNTENEY JEPHSON,

AUTHOR OF 'TOM BULLKLEY OF LISSINGTONS,' 'A PINK WEDDING,' ETC.

### CHAPTER XIII.

'Now, Agatha,' said Sir Tripton Madingley, as he drove his daughter in his mail Phaeton to Lady Cecilia's residence, 'remember what I told you last night, or rather this morning, when we got home from the ball.'

'What, about young Warriner, papa?'

'Yes. *Always* lay to heart whatever your father tells you, my child; but in *this* particular instance be especially mindful of my injunctions. Now, you must not be surprised to see me friendly and cordial with Algernon Warriner; for remember, in the first place, I have known him from infancy; in the second, he has just returned from a victorious campaign, in which, whatever his faults may be, he has shown the most conspicuous gallantry, and he deserves a hearty welcome from his countrymen, especially his old friends.'

'Well, papa,' returned Agatha, 'though I've not seen him since we were both children, still I am an old friend; so I ought to welcome him heartily too.'

Sir Tripton was obliged to correct an imaginary shy on the part of the near horse in order to hide a chuckle, as he thought, 'She's trembling on the brink already; my knowledge of the female

heart in all its workings and ramifications is something marvellous.

'Agatha,' he said severely, at the same time handling the reins as if about to pull up sharp. 'I've a great mind to turn round and drive you straight home again.'

'Why, what have I said or done so very dreadful?'

'Said! Why, have you not dropped an expression which shows me that you are far from entertaining that abhorrence towards Algernon Warriner which my words of this morning should have created in the bosom of any right-minded girl? I tell you, Agatha, you must close your heart to even the very most infinitesimally minute feeling of friendship for that young man.'

'But why, papa? Surely there can be no harm in my being at all events friendly with a man who is a friend of yours?'

'Yes, there is—a deuce of a lot of harm. In my case the friendship could never ripen into any warmer feeling. With you it could. And the day, Agatha, that love for Algernon Warriner were to creep into *your* heart, love for you would fly out of *this* poor broken one.'

Here Sir Tripton indicated the organ in question with the butt-end of his whip, heaved a bitter sigh, and winked his right eye at a pretty face passing along the pavement.

\* The author reserves to himself the right of dramatising this story, or any portion of it.

'Good gracious, papa, how positively ridiculous you are!' exclaimed Agatha, who was a high-spirited girl, and waxed impatient at all this supererogatory warning from a danger she considered herself perfectly safe from. 'One would really think, to hear you going on like this, that I was a girl ready to fall in love with every man I came across.'

'You may,' quickly interposed Sir Tripton, 'with every man but one, and I need hardly add that one is Algernon Warriner.'

'Well, come now, papa, supposing I *was* to fall in love with Algernon Warriner, what then?' Sir Tripton shook his head,

not quickly, for fear of disarranging his curls, and assumed a heart-broken look, as he replied,

'Then grief and shame would turn your father's raven hair snow-white in a fortnight.'

(Soap and water would have done it in five minutes.) After drawing this melancholy picture of paternal woe in its outward and capillary form, Sir Tripton was again obliged to turn his head to hide another wink, as he soliloquised,

'I'll be bound she's half in love with him now. Egad, I haven't broken so many women's hearts without knowing what's inside of them.'

It must not be supposed that Sir Tripton, with all his faults, was the diabolical old reprobate which this soliloquy of his would at first sight make him out to be. He probably did not believe in broken hearts at all, and thought the Roman motto, *Flecti non frangi*, described them pretty accurately. Or, if he *did* believe in broken hearts, he also believed in their wondrous aptitude for mending themselves again. A woman's so-called love-broken heart never failed, he considered,

to avail itself of the course pointed out by Donna Julia,

'To love again, and be again undone,'

continuing the process from time to time as occasion demanded, until it became so case-hardened as not to be able to 'love again.'

This somewhat unpleasant retrospect of Sir Tripton's along the primrose path of dalliance which he had trod for so many years was suddenly dispelled by the worthier reflection that, while thus in his worldly wisdom fanning the flame of love with a bucket of cold water, so to speak, he must be careful that Algernon Warriner's social reputation did not suffer in the process.

'Agatha,' he remarked, with this object in view, 'whatever I have said in disparagement of Algernon Warriner must be between you and myself. It is my duty to have warned you. But let others guard their own ewelams from the fangs of the wolf. Remember, Agatha, not a word of this to any one. Promise me, my child.'

The required promise having been given, Sir Tripton fell into a tender reverie regarding Lady Cecilia, which lasted—with just a few transient interruptions as a pretty face, a fine figure, or a neat ankle crossed his vision—until he drew up before the door of the temple dedicated to the worship of St. Cecilia.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

For the first few days after that memorable evening when his consent to his daughter's union with one of the hated sons of Mars had been wrung from him, Mr. Buddlecombe's mentalequilibrium was, if not upset, decidedly shaken. After all he had thought and said

and done with regard to the military, it was so hard to realise what had happened, that his attempts to do so brought him at times to the verge of temporary insanity. He could not go back from his word, and yet to keep his word would be about as glaring an instance of self-stultification as any individual had ever offered to the world's scorn. What would Puddleton say when Puddleton heard how its mayor, who had all but cursed his people for not opposing the advent of the military, had been the first to give his daughter, his only child, in marriage to one of the red-coated strangers? Would it not be enough to make Puddleton point the finger of scorn and shoot out the tongue of derision at him? Would not Puddleton crack its sides with laughter? And is not ridicule harder to face than physical danger? We need not have read Horace to know that. Men who will stand up before the children of Anak will flee from the slightest breath of ridicule. Puddleton's wrath Mr. Buddlecombe could have faced, but not Puddleton's mirth. In this difficulty it occurred to him to steer a middle course, which, while it would save him from going to pieces on the Scylla of his broken word, would, for a time at all events, save him from the sharp piercing Charybdis of Puddleton's ridicule. This course was secrecy for the present. 'Let it be a secret engagement until matters are a little more settled,' pleaded Mr. Buddlecombe the following morning; and the other side, feeling that they had really carried their point with a completeness and a rapidity far beyond their most sanguine expectations, graciously acceded to this request. This was some relief certainly, but still Mr. Buddlecombe was

so sorely troubled in his mind. He was merely postponing the evil day, and not putting it off altogether.

It was while in this frame of mind, longing to cancel the contract, and yet shrinking from a broken word, that Mr. Buddlecombe received at breakfast-time, two mornings after Algernon Wariner's visit to his mother, a sealed letter marked 'Strictly private.' The envelope bore the postmark of Bradingfield, a large manufacturing town about fifteen miles from Puddleton; and Mr. Buddlecombe having at a glance mastered this fact, broke the seal, and proceeded to peruse the contents as follows:

'White Hart Hotel, Bradingfield.

'Sir,—Up to a few days ago I had as little knowledge of your existence as you probably had of mine. The force of extraordinary circumstances, however, has brought what had apparently been the parallel lines of our respective lives into temporary contact—I, as the mother of Algernon Wariner, and you, as the father of the young lady to whom he has successfully made proposals of marriage. He informs me that though you have given your consent it was wrung from you unwillingly, and that you entertain the strongest objections to the alliance. Believe me, sir, *your* objections to this marriage cannot outweigh *mine*. It occurs to me that in a private conversation together we could possibly arrange some combined course of action which might avert a transaction we each of us regard with so much distaste; and it is with the object of obtaining, as soon as possible, a personal interview with you that I have travelled to this town. For obvious reasons it is best, or I should rather say it is an abso-

lute necessity, that our proceedings in this matter should be conducted with the strictest secrecy. I have therefore come to this town instead of to the one where you reside and my son is quartered. I have taken the further precaution of travelling *incognito*, and I am known here as "Mrs. Harding." In the event of your not responding to my proposition in the spirit I hope for, I trust to your honour not to divulge to a single creature the contents of this letter.—I remain, sir, yours obediently,

'CECILIA WARRINER.'

'What's that enormously long letter about, Joshua?' asked Mrs. Buddlecombe, as her husband, the workings of whose expressive countenance she had been watching with intense curiosity, put the epistle into his inside breast-pocket, and then buttoned up his coat with an air as if defying all efforts to wrest the document from him.

Mr. Buddlecombe looked confused, and then sought to hide his confusion with the reply churlish, 'Nothing to you, Georgina.'

'But it must be something to me if it's anything to you, Joshua,' said Mrs. Buddlecombe, whose conjugal breast was perturbed not only by foiled curiosity. 'A letter which you peruse with the staring eyes and vivid complexion of a boiled lobster must be of sufficient interest for me to justify me in asking what it is about. And you cannot plead the excuse that it's on business, and therefore I should not understand it, for I see it is in the handwriting of a lady,' this last statement being accompanied by a toss of the head.

From the reply churlish Mr. Buddlecombe proceeded to the counter-check quarrelsome.

'Hold your tongue, Georgina.'

Mrs. Buddlecombe *did* hold her tongue. But if a woman holds her tongue when she is told to do so, depend upon it the silence is terribly significant.

All through the meal Mr. Buddlecombe was strangely *distract*. He put a pat of butter into his tea, and tried to spread a lump of sugar on his toast. He attempted more than once to read his napkin, and wiped his mouth with the newspaper.

After finishing his breakfast Mr. Buddlecombe repaired to his study, and there read the letter over again. The results of the second perusal were that he called for his boots, walked hurriedly to the railway station, took a first-class return ticket for Bradingfield, arrived there in due time, walked to the White Hart Hotel, and inquired for Mrs. Harding.

'Who shall I say, sir?' asked the waiter.

'Mr. Bud— Ahem, say a gentleman who heard from the lady this morning; that will be quite sufficient,' replied Mr. Buddlecombe, who thought it better to follow his fair fellow-conspirator's lead, and not divulge his identity.

The waiter retired, and, after a few minutes, returned with the message, obtained through the medium of the chambermaid, that the lady had not yet left her room, but that if the gentleman would be good enough she would see him shortly.

'Will you step up into the lady's private sitting-room, sir?' added the waiter.

Hotel-waiters never ask people to walk this, that, or the other way. They invite them to step up, down, or into.

Mr. Buddlecombe stepped up, as desired, into a private room, where he was left for a considerable period in solitary grandeur; for, with his usual impetuosity,

he had paid rather an earlier visit than Lady Cecilia was prepared for, and without the maid Froisette, whose services had of course been dispensed with for the time being, the operations of the *toilette* were considerably prolonged.

At last they terminated, and Lady Cecilia entered the sitting-room, pale, proud, self-possessed, and beautiful.

'Mr. Buddlecombe, I presume,' she said, with just the slightest possible deviation from her bodily perpendicular as that gentleman faced round from the window, out of which he had been looking, and bowed stiffly. 'Pray be seated,' she continued, as a second bow, even stiffer than the first, intimated that her presumption was correct.

Mr. Buddlecombe seated himself on the very edge of a chair, as if he only sat *pro forma*, and not as an acceptance of any civility on the part of his hostess, while she took her seat opposite.

'I am much obliged to you for so promptly replying in person to my letter,' said Lady Cecilia, who so far was having all the talking to herself; for, in truth, Mr. Buddlecombe was as yet completely taken aback by the unexpected youth and beauty of his fair correspondent, 'and it leads me to expect your coöperation in the course I am about to propose to you.'

'Promptitude and energy have ever characterised my actions, or I should not have attained the very high position I now hold,' said Mr. Buddlecombe, just to remind her that no nose, no matter how aristocratic or exquisitely chiselled, should be turned up at a mayor or anything connected with him.

For all the effect, however, that his remark had, the face opposite to him might have been, for impassiveness as well as faultlessness

of outline, a masterpiece from the hands of Praxiteles.

'But,' continued Mr. Buddlecombe, 'if on the present occasion I have shown even more than my usual promptitude, it has no doubt arisen out of my extreme anxiety to guard my daughter from a *mésalliance*.'

Herein Mr. Buddlecombe was rude, not to say gratuitously impertinent; but to give him his due, it must be explained that he made the remark, not so much because he wanted to be rude as because he fully expected it would be made to him, and he thought he would be first in the field with it.

It is a way of the world. Brown often cuts Jones for no other reason under the sun than that he thinks Jones is going to cut him. And Smith frequently snubs Robinson, with whom he would gladly fraternise, because he thinks Robinson is about to snub him. This is the real secret of a great deal of rudeness in all classes of society.

'I have already been informed that you regard this match with disfavour,' returned Lady Cecilia, without the slightest symptom of temper, whatever she may have felt. 'I said as much in my letter to you. Indeed, I should not have sought this interview had I not had that reason for supposing you would aid and abet me in my efforts to prevent the projected alliance.'

Mr. Buddlecombe felt rather like a small boy who has thrown a piece of mud at a white marble statue and missed it. Or would it give a better notion of Mr. Buddlecombe's feelings to compare them with those of the gentleman who fired a bullet point-blank into an apparition, and had his missile calmly and politely returned to him? He coughed uneasily, and, warned by an omin-

ous creak from his chair that he had better put as much of his pride in his pocket as would admit of his sitting a little farther back, did so.

'Now,' continued the statuesque beauty, in the same calm dispassionate strain, 'the first step is to get these infatuated young people away from each other's influence. I have sufficient interest at the Horse Guards to get my son ordered away from Puddleton on some immediate and special service. I have already seen his colonel, who, fortunately, was in town, and he will offer no opposition. I can thus answer to get my son out of the way for the present. Can you do the same with regard to your daughter? Pray do not think I wish to pry into your family matters. I merely ask the question in my anxiety to further your views as well as my own on this point. Is there any relation to whom you might send your daughter, and from whom she would receive no encouragement in this romantic fancy?'

Mr. Buddlecombe thought of 'Aunt Virginia in the North,' that bugbear of poor Florence's young life, and he replied, 'I have,' with a grimace which might be expected to mark a person replying in the affirmative to the query, 'Have you such a thing as a guillotine at home?'

'So far that is satisfactory,' said Lady Cecilia. 'We may now look upon what might be called the deed of separation as an accomplished fact.'

'But they will write to each other,' said Mr. Buddlecombe.

'I have thought of that. It is the next point to be considered.'

'And a very knotty one too,' interposed Mr. Buddlecombe.

'Quite so. But the solution of the difficulty lies more in your hands than in mine.'

'Does it, indeed?'

'Yes. I cannot prevent my son from writing to your daughter, but it is quite within your power to prevent her from receiving what he writes.'

As Lady Cecilia said this a little of the frigid self-possession deserted her, and a faint flush suffused her pale face. All through the interview Mr. Buddlecombe had experienced an uncomfortable feeling that he was not only playing second fiddle, but that his fiddle was an instrument of a very inferior description. He felt he now had a chance of performing on the first Stradivarius in the loftiest strain. He accordingly tuned up, and went off as follows:

'No matter how ardently I may wish for this match to be broken off, I am nevertheless not quite prepared to go to the lengths of intercepting the letters written to my daughter by the man I have consented to recognise as her accepted suitor, even though that consent was obtained from me under false pretences—I may say, wrung from me by force.'

Lady Cecilia winced for a moment, and the faint flush deepened; but she speedily resumed the game with consummate skill.

'I should imagine that you would have considered a consent extorted from you under the circumstances you mention as hardly binding on your conscience. Of course we must never judge solely by appearances; and I have your own assurance that you have been an unwilling participator in this matter; but you must excuse me when I say it does not look very like it.'

Mr. Buddlecombe rose greedily at the fly which the expert angler had thrown, and gorged it.

'If you think, madam—as your manner implies you do—that my repugnance to this engagement is



not genuine, let me most emphatically state that you are mightily mistaken. To guard myself from further miscomprehension I must speak plainly. I regard this union with such unfeigned detestation that I will leave no stone unturned to cancel it. I admit being at first carried away by a mistaken sense of duty; but I now see it would be worse than folly on my part to regard the trumpery effusions of a love-sick puppy in any more serious light than as rubbish for the dust-bin, and I shall take precious good care they find their way there without the intermediate delay of passing through my daughter's hands. I promise you that, madam. The idea of hinting that I'm not in earnest, indeed, when I say I detest the thoughts of this union! The thing is preposterous!

Mr. Buddlecombe had thus far vented his indignation and played most beautifully into Lady Cecilia's hands, when a slight scuffle was heard outside the door.

'Stand aside, I tell you; I *shall* enter this room. I have a right, a sacred right, to follow,' said a voice, which caused Mr. Buddlecombe to rise from his chair with not altogether pleased surprise.

Then ensued a short struggle over the door-handle, and then, *mirabile dictu*, Mrs. Buddlecombe, who had evidently got the best of the encounter with a little pale-faced waiter—more on the principle perhaps that weight is might than that right is—burst into the room with a precipitation that was due not so much to indignation as to the fact that the battle of the door-handle had ended in a victory for her rather more suddenly than had been altogether anticipated.

The good lady's presence was

not so strange after all, and is, on psychological grounds, easily accounted for. The long letter in a female hand; its effect on Mr. Buddlecombe; his snappish refusal to give her the slightest information as to its contents; his subsequent abstraction surpassing anything of the kind she had ever noticed in him before; his mysterious disappearance after breakfast,—all united in creating a turmoil of jealousy which, with an undercurrent of curiosity, raised such a heavy sea of troubles in Mrs. Buddlecombe's bosom, that she determined at once to take up arms against them, and by opposing end them. Anything was better than to go on enduring those 'damned moments' 'twixt doting and doubting. For Mrs. Buddlecombe, notwithstanding an occasional matrimonial skirmish, was a true and fondly-loving wife. She made up her mind to follow Mr. Buddlecombe, and to settle her doubts one way or the other. There was no difficulty in the first part of the proceeding. Mr. Buddlecombe was as easily traced in Puddleton and its environs as the Monument would be in London if it took it into its pine-apple head some fine day to glide off to the West-end.

In the first moment after entering the room, Mrs. Buddlecombe's eyes glanced from her husband to Lady Cecilia, and the beauty of the latter at once redoubled those jealous torments to which she had been a prey ever since the receipt of that letter at breakfast-time.

'O!' said Mrs. Buddlecombe; and it is really wonderful the amount of meaning that can be thrown into this little monosyllable on certain occasions. Mrs. Buddlecombe evidently thought so, for she repeated this rhetorical *multum in parvo*.

Consciousness that appearances

are against one's innocence is often quite as disconcerting as conscious guilt itself; and our worthy Mayor of Puddleton, though as innocent as any man could be of the charges he read in his wife's flashing eyes and excited demeanour, wore an air of detected gallantry.

'My dear, what on earth brings you here?' he mildly stammered; for, like many excitable people, he hated what is called a 'scene' if it was not of his own making, and he detected symptoms of such a storm brewing as had never yet burst upon his head. He did not object to a 'row' now and then; but he preferred it, like his bread, home-made. Moreover, it is one thing laying the rod over people when you know they will kiss it, and another when you see they are quite ready to return the strokes double-fold.

'I need not ask what has brought you here, Joshua,' said Mrs. Buddlecombe, with a furious glance at the lovely face which she took for the magnet of attraction.

'Nonsense, Georgina; you're making a mountain of a molehill.'

'You may well compare this transaction of yours to a molehill,' said poor dear Mrs. Buddlecombe, quivering in the grasp of the green-eyed monster; 'for a molehill is the result of a sneaking, grovelling, underhand, low proceeding on the part of a debased animal. There!'

'I tell you, Georgina, the ridiculous notions you have got into that head of yours are absolutely groundless.'

'If there is nothing wrong, what is there to be ashamed of? And if there is nothing to be ashamed of, why all this secrecy and mystery in the meeting with this—this individual?' said Mrs. Buddlecombe, with another furious glance at the beautiful face which

she thought had weaned her Joshua's affections from their lawful object.

'Don't make an idiot of yourself,' said Mr. Buddlecombe, astonishment and confusion now giving way to wrath. 'I tell you again that your notions are beyond the bounds of possibility.'

'But jealous souls will not be answered so.'

'Seeing is believing,' half-sobbed Mrs. Buddlecombe. 'I call it scandalous! an assignation! At your time of life, too! O Joshua!'

Here poor Mrs. Buddlecombe, worn out by her morning's exertions as an amateur detective, and sick at heart with grief and rage, sank to the sofa, and, having buried her face in her handkerchief, became hysterical.

At this point Lady Cecilia, who had been surveying the intruder with silent scorn, rose from the seat, and with Juno-like dignity moved to the door.

'We have fortunately arranged all that is necessary for the present,' she said, in an undertone, as she passed Mr. Buddlecombe. 'Remember your promise about the letters.'

Now, notwithstanding that Mrs. Buddlecombe was busily engaged in a hysterical performance, and that her head was buried in her handkerchief, she nevertheless, through a peephole in the embroidery, managed to keep a jealous eye on the movements of the enemy, and she thus witnessed their surreptitious piece of confidence. This was making 'assurance double sure.' It was the last link in the chain of evidence, proving to her beyond a doubt that an understanding which would not bear the light of a wife's countenance existed between the two.

'Abandoned creature, how dare

you carry on your intrigue with my husband before my very eyes?' said Mrs. Buddlecombe, rising from the sofa and stamping her foot, while Mr. Buddlecombe betrayed unmistakable symptoms of getting the steam up for an explosion.

Lady Cecilia paused, calmly turned round, and, fixing her assailant with a vacant stare, *à la* Lady Clara Vere de Vere, sought to slay her with her noble birth, after the manner of the afore-mentioned heartless young lady. Of this latter advantage, however, Mrs. Buddlecombe was completely ignorant, and the shaft was harmless.

'Yes, you may be beautiful, but you're bad,' she cried, in a hysterical burst.

Her manners had not that repose which Lady Cecilia's had.

'You wicked woman, parading and flashing before my very eyes your diamonds, bought, I suppose, with my miserable husband's money, as if you were glorying over me!' continued the excited lady, beginning the long sentence with a scream, and ending it in a wail, as the supposed destroyer of her domestic happiness gathered up her skirt with a richly-jewelled hand, and swept from the room in silent contempt.

Five minutes afterwards the Mayor of Puddleton strode along the streets of Bradingfield on his way to the railway-station. His hat was pressed over his eyes, his fists were clenched, and the deep mutterings which escaped his compressed lips caused the passers-by to turn round and watch the rapidly receding figure with feelings of pity, pain, sorrow, anger, or amusement, according to their individual views on the subject of strong language.

On Mr. Buddlecombe's way to Puddleton in the train, a mild

old gentleman, sitting opposite to him, feebly dropped an observation on the fineness of the day, and he shortly after registered a vow that he would never again as long as he lived make use of such an insulting remark to a perfect stranger.

On arriving at his home, Mr. Buddlecombe's wrath reached its zenith, or rather, as passion is by no means an exalted sentiment, it would be more correct to say, descended to its nadir.

'Those accursed military!' exclaimed Mr. Buddlecombe, as he dashed his hat with all his might on the tessellated floor of his hall. 'Every bit of all this can be traced back to them. I *always* said, from the moment I heard they were coming to Puddleton, all our peace and happiness and respectability would be blighted. The slime of the military serpent has poisoned our lives. I could crush it under my heel.'

And here Mr. Buddlecombe applied that treatment to his hat, as if it had really been the reptile in point; while Spigot stood looking on at the performance, trembling from head to foot, and murmuring, 'Certainly, your most worshipful worship.'

An hour afterwards Mrs. Buddlecombe returned from the White Hart Hotel, after having there sounded all the depths of female sympathy, from *sal volatile* to *cardamoms*, from *cardamoms* to burnt feathers, from burnt feathers to cognac, and from cognac to what was perhaps, under the peculiar circumstances, the most invigorating and refreshing restorative of all—a female chorus of abuse poured upon men in general, and husbands in particular, who were denounced as 'wicked deceivers, the whole lot of them, and not worth worrying and fretting about.'

## CHAPTER XV.

THOUGH Lady Cecilia Warriner comported herself with such disdainful calmness through what had been, beyond all comparison, the most trying ordeal ever imposed upon her nerves or her pride, the iron had entered deeply into her soul. She felt almost stunned in spirit. Seldom had pride had such a fall, for it was not often that pride fell from such a height to so low a depth. To figure in such a scene as the one she had just passed through would have been, in her own estimation, a degradation, had she even played the first part. But to figure as an *intrigante* with an old button manufacturer! O, horrible, too horrible! She shuddered. She loathed herself to think that even in the diseased fancies of a jealous brain such a part should be assigned to her. She felt degraded.

But her cup of degradation was not yet full. That bumper of bitterness was yet in store for her. She was sitting in her room shortly after the departure of Mrs. Buddcombe from the hotel, when the landlord knocked at the door, using his knuckles with an unnecessary force that was, in itself, an impertinence. Hardly awaiting a reply, he turned the handle and appeared in the doorway. He was a coarse free-and-easy man, with a thin veneer of civility, which success was hourly rendering thinner. He was flashily dressed, and wore a gigantic albert watch-guard, a style of jewelry which, I think, had only just then superseded the old-fashioned all-round-the-neck chain.

'Who are you?' asked Lady Cecilia, with a supercilious stare.

'The landlord of this establishment,' was the reply, with a smile, as he stroked his chin with one

hand, and rattled his watch-chain with the other.

'Retire at once,' commanded Lady Cecilia; 'and if you have anything to communicate send the chambermaid.'

'O, I think we can dispense with all that ceremony,' said the man, with a horribly significant insolence that crimsoned poor Lady Cecilia's cheeks.

She was above bandying words with such a low brute, and quietly turned her back upon him.

'I came myself,' he continued, leaning an elbow against the framework of the door, and crossing one leg in front of the other, 'for what I have to say had best come straight from me. It is to give you notice to quit my house at your earliest convenience. This establishment is conducted on principles of the strictest propriety, and after all the fuss and rumpus that's occurred here this morning, I must request you to leave it. There's a train starts for London in twenty minutes. You could go by that, couldn't you?'

'Go away, and send the chambermaid at once.'

The man was nettled by the tones of command.

'Ladies who dress as you do, and wear the magnificent rings you wear, if they are *real* ladies, generally travel about with their own maids,' he said. 'However, I'll send the chambermaid up to help you to get your things together, and I hope you'll be ready for an early start. In the mean time, though, I'll trouble you to settle this little bill.'

A word more, a moment longer than could be avoided with this man, was abhorrent to Lady Cecilia. Not that she felt exactly angry. He did not rise to that point. We may shudder at contact with a worm, but we do not get angry with it. She never looked at the out-

held bill, but produced from her purse a five-pound note, which she placed on the table.

'There,' she said, 'take the amount out of that, and give the balance to some local charity, if you have the honesty to do so.'

Your 'if' is not always such a peacemaker as Touchstone made out. The man was mollified by the first part of the sentence and the sight of the note, but the 'if' stung him into insolence again.

'Ah, thanks,' he said, taking up the note and scrutinising it, to see that it was not a flash one. 'I'll do what you wish. They're starting what they call a Magdalene Home in the town here, and I'll give the balance to that as a very appropriate object.'

With this the ruffian retired, feeling as if he had performed a meritorious act.

Within a quarter of an hour Lady Cecilia walked through the hall to the fly on which her luggage had already been placed. There was quite a turn-out of the establishment to speed the parting guest, and a running fire of audible whispers and tittering greeted her progress.

'By George, she's a 'andsome woman, though, ain't she?' remarked a Bradingfield 'blood,' who had made about twenty thousand pounds, and fancied he was a gentleman.

'By gad, she is!' acquiesced his companion, who laboured under a similar wild hallucination with regard to himself, and was smoking a cigar at the bar. 'She's a regular screamer.'

'Horrid creature,' said the landlady, in tones meant to reach the ears they would most offend. 'P'raps she'll now know what style of 'ouses to keep her assassinations at in future.'

Even the white-faced wretched little waiter, who had grovelled

before her on her arrival the previous evening, flourished his napkin with the air of a Lothario in disguise, and winked at her, a performance of which its object remained in profound ignorance.

Like Marie Antoinette walking through the midst of the *canaille*, Lady Cecilia moved on with a dignity which nothing could debase.

'Dear me,' said the landlady, exasperated at the apparent impotence of her last envenomed shaft, and now having recourse to what she considered a stroke of the severest irony, 'one would think she was a lady of title. John, show her ladyship out. He, he, he!'

John was the 'Boots'; and though his face was distorted into a grin when it was turned towards his mistress, it wore a respectful enough expression as he put it into the window of the fly and touched his cap.

'Tell him to drive on at once,' said Lady Cecilia, who left all such details of travel as 'tipping' to her servants, and failed to catch the true meaning of Boots' civility.

'Drive on,' growled the disappointed suitor, banging the door of the fly, and further revenging himself by pointing his thumb over his shoulder at the receding vehicle, and making faces.

'Well, I'm blowed,' said the ostler, who stood by tainting the air with the redolence of the stable, and who deeply commiserated Boots in his misfortune, more especially as it was a sort of one which might overtake himself any hour of the day, 'she carries 'er 'ead so 'igh they'd ought to put a martingale on her;' a professional sally that elicited a good deal of merriment from the bystanders.\*

\* The reader must remember that all

For all her brave bearing, Lady Cecilia felt humbled to the dust.

'Algernon,' she said, as she threw herself back on the seat of the fly, 'I shall never forgive you for having brought all this upon me.'

Had not Lady Cecilia brought it upon herself?

On arriving at the station she found that the train was on the point of starting, and on reaching the platform it was actually moving off; but so anxious was she to shake the dust of Bradingfield off her feet that she determined at all risks to seize the present opportunity of leaving the hated place for ever behind her. Her luggage was dragged into the guard's-van, and she herself was assisted into the nearest compartment, which happened to be one reserved for the use of smokers. There was but one other occupant, a young man, and she noticed that, though her presence was an invasion of his privileges, he silently and immediately threw away the cigar he had been smoking. It was not much to do, and was only what many gentlemen under the circumstances would have done, but to Lady Cecilia

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this happened in the land which Macaulay justly and wittily laughed at for its strange fits of 'outrageous virtue;' in the land where, a few years ago, a young lady, the sister of an undergraduate, was deported as a bad character, from one of our principal seats of learning, while paying a short visit to her brother there, on the all-sufficient and shocking grounds of having a pretty face and being fashionably dressed.

it seemed like the first glimpse of civilisation after passing through a land of savages.

'Thank you,' she said; for she disliked the smell of a cigar in a confined space, and was really grateful for the small act of politeness.

The young man acknowledged her recognition of his trifling courtesy with a bow and a commonplace phrase, but his manner was full of that chivalrous respect for a woman which goes so far towards making a true gentleman. He might have served as an illustration of Rochefoucauld's maxim, that the air of gentle breeding is acquired most easily in a camp, for the young man had just returned from the camp before Sebastopol, he happening to be one of Algernon's brother-officers, on his way up to London from Puddleton.

Lady Cecilia's proud spirit, that was proof against insult, now broke down under the first touch of true politeness. The tears that most women would have had recourse to long before now came to her relief. She turned her face, shielded it with her handkerchief, and for many miles of the journey cried in silent bitterness. The morning's work had humbled her to the dust. But humiliation is good for such as Lady Cecilia.

'It teaches them that they are flesh and blood;

It also gently hints to them that others, Although of clay, are yet not quite of mud;

That urns and pipkins are but fragile brothers.'



## A SCRAMBLE ON THE ROCKS,

Or an Ebb-Tide Lesson for Holiday Hours.

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THE season approaches when a general exodus takes place from London; everybody hastening from the heat and dust of an unprotected city to Scotch highlands, the Continent, or one of our own innumerable seaside resorts. After the toil and confusion of a great city, it is new life to a man if he can gain his three weeks' freedom from business cares, while he drinks in pure ozone from invigorating sea-breezes, and lives within sound of the never-resting ocean.

It cannot be said, however, that the average man makes the best use of his time at the seaside. The hours frequently hang heavy. He smokes his pipe, and diligently scans the papers in the vain hope of finding matters of interest, and if the weather be fine takes the accustomed sea-bath. But one cannot very well occupy the days entirely with bathing and smoking; with no pursuits it must inevitably prove tedious. Our friend groans in the spirit, and longs for the dinner-hour. If he does stroll along the beach or wander among the rocks, it is in an aimless fashion, with no eyes for the living wonders which he treads under foot.

Let us picture ourselves on a rocky shore, as the tide gradually recedes, watching the scores of beautiful objects which glide noiselessly from pool to pool, hiding among many-coloured seaweeds, or creeping under shelter of loose stones. For the examination of these treasures of the deep it is only necessary to have a

pocket-lens to detect minute forms, and a pickle-bottle to carry them home alive; an ordinary microscope is sufficient to investigate the results of a morning's fishing, with a glass trough (which may be purchased for a shilling from any scientific-instrument maker), which enables us to place each tiny zoophyte on the microscopic stage in its native element, alive and vigorous.

There are many families and orders of the animal kingdom commonly represented in tidal pools. It may be the curious mollusca called nudibranchiata, so named from its external gills, and because the shell, present in the young stage, is thrown off as the animal develops. There are several hundred species of this family, of almost every imaginable colour, many of them exquisitely marked. The sea-lemon is the common type, milky-white in colour, and not unlike a fat slug: it abounds at low-water mark, either on seaweeds or as a free swimmer. The annelids are another large family, worm-like in form, the body composed of ringed segments; some build houses for themselves, from which they take an occasional ramble, while others live unprotected among the finer species of weed. The arachnida are another group favourable for microscopic study, of which the sea-mite is a representative. It might be mistaken for a young crab, but be sure it is not; for the young crab is as unlike its elders as a tadpole is unlike a frog.

The ova of fish and molluscs may be sought for among the tangled roots of laminaria, the brown ribbon-like weed which is so well known as a weather-glass, or under stone. Place a cluster of eggs in the live trough, and the examination will astonish those who have never had the opportunity of studying organic germs. If the mass of ova is in healthy condition, a rapid motion will at once be detected. If the eggs are of some shell-fish, the outline of a shell is distinctly visible, but quite transparent; thus the revolving movement of the animal is seen, and the development of organs can be noted from day to day. It is possible to follow the various stages of life from the commencement of motion till the mollusc breaks through; then it invariably dies, doubtless because we can no longer imitate its natural conditions.

If it be the ova of fish, the circulation of blood and heart-action may readily be studied; at each throb of the heart-valves a drop of blood is forced through the vessels, to circulate to the tail of the embryo, and back to the heart through smaller vessels.

The marine zoophytes form the connecting link between the animal and vegetable kingdoms, although science has now definitely placed them with the former. There are two main divisions in the zoophyte world—the hydrozoa and the more highly organised polyzoa. If it had not been for the invention of the microscope, nearly the whole of these two groups of animals must have remained unknown to science, for the structure is invisible to the naked eye. I think it is hardly realised, the important part played by minute animal forms in the construction of our earth. The large mammalia, such as the ele-

phant or rhinoceros, are mighty creatures; but what part have they played in the formation of mountain or rock? On the other hand, look how whole mountain chains have been ascertained to consist of atoms, each atom the remains of some microscopic form. The pyramids of Egypt, for instance, consist entirely of millions of a small organism called a nummulate (from nummus, a coin, there being a resemblance to a flat coin). This is the case in recent times, as is proved by the deep-sea dredgings of H.M.S. Challenger. We read that deposits are now forming in the bed of the Atlantic, chiefly composed of organic forms of minute size, together with particles of material wasted from older rocks, which will in future ages become a compact stratum, similar to our white chalk. There is a constant wearing away and redepositing of matter in the terrestrial part of our globe, unceasing though almost imperceptible. I suppose the amount of matter is the same now as at the creation of the world; proportions and chemical union may change, but matter remains indestructible.

The primary divisions of zoophytes are the hydrozoa and polyzoa, similar in external forms, but differing essentially in many points of internal structure.

The hydroids have no nervous system, and no organ of sense that can be identified as such; no organ exclusively appropriated to the functions of respiration, no circulatory system, nor vessels for carrying digested food through the body. The water simply flows over the external surface and through the general cavity, whence the polype derives oxygen sufficient for life. They may be said to be simply developments of a common central fleshy mass, identical with it in structure and tex-

ture. Polyzoa exist, each individual, as a separate organism, although connected one with the other. As Johnston aptly expresses it, hydroids are like a chain, each link of which is welded together, while the polyzoa may be compared to beads strung together by a percurrent thread. In organisation the polyzoa are nearly allied to the mollusca, although the latter never protrude from the cells in the same manner as the polype. They never occur in a separate or naked form, as some hydroids do, but are always in a polypidom or cell, which is either calcareous or membranous. The tentacles of the polype are ciliated, by means of which particles of food are drawn into the mouth. The stomach and a narrow intestinal canal are developed in polyzoan forms. There is no organ of sense, though the polype is sensible of external impressions. Left undisturbed in still water, the polypes protrude and disport themselves freely; but if the water is suddenly shaken the animal instantly retires, remaining hidden from view for some minutes. If one polype is suddenly touched with a sharp instrument it retires instantly, the rest taking no notice, apparently unconscious that anything has happened.

For examination, let us take a few of the commoner forms of marine zoophyte. The flustra (seamat) is sure to be met with, although often cast aside as a seaweed. It is drab-coloured, and resembles a seaweed in growth, with flat fronds and spreading branches. Looking carefully at a fragment, the naked eye will detect a honeycomb perforation unlike any true seaweed. Taking a piece which has not been left high and dry on the beach, we will proceed to place it under a low power, with plenty of sea-water

in the trough to float the object. If the sun is shining, place your microscope so that the condensed or reflected light may fall on the flustra, or if working by night place a lamp in similar position. The whole will be found composed of endless cells in semi-alternate rows, arched at the top and armed with spines; the opening often covered with a semi-transparent lid, through which the polype, crowned with a number of tentacles, protrudes itself. It is a beautiful sight to watch a dozen inhabitants of the tiny cells busily waving their ciliated tentacles in search of particles of food which are derived from the sea-water. The tentacles are said to be ciliated on account of a series of minute hairs which revolve in ceaseless whirl, thus creating a vortex in which fragments are engulfed for the nourishment of the polype. Observe, however, if the atom is not suitable food it can be instantly ejected in some marvellous manner. Under the polariscope a common flustra has a gorgeous effect, the rays of light, divided when passed through the refracting Iceland spar and plate of selenite, giving all the brilliancy of the prismatic colours to each cell, already golden in the sunlight; the latter experiment of course entails the use of special appliances beyond an ordinary microscope. The flustra is the commonest form of marine polyzoa.

It has been estimated that the number of inhabitants of a single root is equal to the population of London or Pekin. In hot summer weather the flustra and many other zoophytes are phosphorescent, a fact that has often been noted. To prove this, place a number of specimens in a dark room and hit them sharply with a bit of stick; every cell will then show its tiny spark.

Another common species, membranipora, infests the red seaweed (plocamium). A close observation of a frond almost invariably shows a fine network covering the stalk with a lace-like structure. Under the microscope each cell appears slightly tubular, is armed with sharp teeth, and has upright hollow bristles springing from the base of each cell; the polype has twelve tentacles. Under a strong light the cells look like frosted silver, and are granulated on the outside. The growth of this polyzoon is so rapid that whole fronds of seaweed get killed, in the same manner as ivy is said to kill large trees.

Another interesting zoophite is cellularia, parasitical on corallines from deep water. It is silvery white, the stem consisting of twisted fibres, having a double row of cells; at the external side it has a remarkable structure called 'the bird's head,' which opens and shuts as a bird's beak. Naturalists have never been able to form any conclusions as to the use of this appendage, which has motion as long as the polype lives. In some localities it is common, but totally absent in others. After a storm it may be looked for on the roots of laminaria, on which it sometimes attains a length of two inches. To secure living specimens, cut away a piece of seaweed root with the zoophite, as tearing it off with the fingers will kill the animal and destroy the delicate structure. With all zoophites the greatest care is requisite to obtain uninjured specimens.

The sertularia represent the hydroid zoophites, and are sure to be met with either adhering to oyster-shells, or creeping among the roots of the fucus (sea-wrack); they are mostly seen transparent, and about the colour of horn,

having stems with pinnate branches and cells on either side, opposite in some species, alternate in others. These corallines, together with the nearly allied plumularias, are frequently mistaken for seaweeds, and are commonly called 'Prince of Wales's feathers.' A plumularia is usually a more decided yellow colour than a sertularia, and has polype cells only on one side. Notice the kind of bud formed at intervals on these corallines; it is by such buds or vesicles, as they are called, dropping off that fresh colonies of zoophites are formed. It is very interesting to watch a spray of sertularia under the microscope, having perhaps a dozen polypes extended on one branch. Shake the trough, and every tentacle retires with incredible swiftness, and nothing can be seen for a couple of minutes; at length a single polype cautiously surveys the scene, and apparently communicates with his neighbours, for out they all come immediately, playing as eagerly as if nothing had happened to frighten them. Each polype undoubtedly communicates with the other through a central channel; yet each can exist independent of the other. To prove this, sever a branchlet from the main stem, and the polypes of the fragment will continue their ceaseless play. At the same time, the act of cutting is felt by each individual, for all invariably retire into their houses. This is a delicate experiment, which anybody can make for himself, and in five cases out of six I think the severed polypes will continue to disport themselves. The ovarian vesicles are produced twice in the year, in spring and autumn.

Perhaps the most fascinating forms likely to be caught are the delicate and fragile campanularias,

some of which grow upright from a trailing root, while others creep on the surface of stones or up the stalks of seaweed, even as the ivy-leaved campanula creeps in a Devonshire wood. *Laomedea* is a good type of the order. The cells are invariably bell-shaped, as the name denotes, and the stem of each bell frequently ringed. The whole structure is transparent, so that every movement of the polype may be observed, even if he refuses to expand. When fully open, the polype is like a beautiful composite flower, such as the daisy. The ovarian vesicles are usually placed at the axil of the main stem and branches, the ova being easily detected within. A touch with a camel's-hair brush is sufficient to destroy this fragile organism; yet it survives the fury of the strongest gales in its native element. Each cup is provided with a hinge, which allows the polype cell to sway to and fro with each wave or surging current of the sea. With a pocket-lens this may be studied in a pool through which the tide gently threads its way. According to the direction of the current, so will the polype cell bend, never suffering the slightest injury; yet in transferring a specimen from a basin to a microscopic trough, how often do we destroy all beauty of form! The structure of a man is beyond our comprehension, yet the more we study Nature the greater evidence do we find that the Almighty completeness of power is exhibited in every phase of life, from man to a blade of grass. The spongy-looking substance on scallops, oysters, and other shells is a zoophite named *alecyonium*, perhaps better known by the pleasant-sounding name 'dead men's fingers,' a species apparently intermediate between the microscopic forms of hydroids

and the sea-anemone. The outer surface is covered with star-shaped cells, divided into eight rays. The tentacles of the polype are short and ciliated. That *alecyonium* is nearly allied to the sponges is proved by the presence of spicula, which are soluble in mineral acids. A single spicula under the microscope usually appears cross-shaped, with jagged edges; with polarised light it is a very beautiful object.

The *lucernariæ* are among the uncommon forms of zoophites. At extreme low-water mark these cup-shaped animals are found attached to seaweeds which fringe the sandy pools. The substance of the body is similar to the sea-anemone, and it has tufts of tentacles. They can easily detach themselves to swim across a pool or catch at anything they come in contact with. Place your hand against a *lucernaria*, and it adheres instantly, as many anemones do. The ova can often be seen inside the cup. The other member of this family is among the rarest of marine zoophites, the *iluanthos* *Scoticus* of E. Forbes. It is a free swimmer, with a worm-like body and tuft of long white tentacles, which move so rapidly that it is impossible to number them. They love the mud, but if disturbed wriggle across a pool quickly, and in a most irritated manner. Some are pure white, while others are either striped or tinged, generally with pink.

Occasionally weed is found having a series of minute bodies, which, when magnified, look like a number of ninepins. Every minute one fellow will give a great sweep with his whole body, knocking down half a dozen of his companions; this goes on at intervals. It is naturally a destructive game, and a head occasionally falls off. Strange to say, this does

not kill the zoophite; the stem enlarges, and a second head is developed, ready for further warfare. This genus is the pedicellina.

Serialaria is a delicate form of polypzoa, commonly called nit-coralline or Pan's-pipes, resembling the curious parasite plant the dodder. The cell clusters grow at intervals on an irregular stem, each cluster like a series of organ-pipes. The polype is very seldom seen extended, and is one of our smallest species. It attaches itself either to fucus or other common weed.

Bowerbankia, named after the well-known authority on sponges, is a species liable to be overlooked, nothing being visible to the naked eye but fine white threads in a confused tangle, either on algae or floating by itself in tidal pools. When magnified the cells are like cones springing from a main stem. The polype has ten tentacles, and is finely ciliated; it has the power of bending itself almost at right angles with the cell. Cycloum is another beautiful object for the microscope, usually found attached to fucus. The surface might almost be a model of Alpine peaks, for it is composed of a series of conical papillae, exactly like miniature peaks. The polype protrudes, not from the papillae, but from cells placed between; they have eighteen tentacles, and the body is bell-shaped, extending a great distance from the cell. The species is remarkable for the ciliated ova which are discharged from the cells, able to move them-

selves by means of the fine revolving hairs which encircle the germ. This wonderful property is not confined to marine zoophites, for a similar process may be observed in several of the confervoid algae or seaweeds, the seeds of which have motion after being discharged from the spore cases by means of the same minute cilia. Microscopists have frequently mistaken such seeds for animal life, an error, I think, most excusable.

On the sheltered surface of rocks there are occasionally the smallest specks of a rose-coloured jelly-looking substance. This is another hydroid zoophite, called clava. Each polype is single and unprotected, consisting of a stem and club-shaped head, surrounded irregularly with tentacles, which vary in number. Another species there is not unlike clava, but growing up a branched stem, with polypes on alternate sides, two or even three inches high; this is the coryna, which has also a clubbed head and irregular tentacles.

These are but examples of many hundred species which have been ascertained to live on our coast. They are so easy to obtain and of such infinite variety, if once interest is awakened time will no longer hang heavy during a holiday at the seaside, and a little experience soon enables any one to procure a sufficient quantity for observation, for each weed or stone has its parasitic zoophite attached.

C. P.